Iraq Denies Massing Troops Near Kuwait

BAGHDAD -- Iraq denied on Saturday claims by Kuwait that it was massing troops along its southern border in a threat to the oil-rich monarchy, according to a senior Iraqi military official.

"We deny any movement or reinforcement of troops in southern Iraq," the official was quoted by the official INA news agency as saying.

"There is no reinforcement of troops or unusual movement of our army anywhere in Iraq, particularly in the south," the official added.

(Contd on Pg. 14)



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Palestinian Police Torture Detainee to Death

NABLUS, West Bank -- A Palestinian detainee died on Saturday in the autonomous West Bank town of Nablus after being tortured by Palestinian police, a human rights group said.

Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (Law) said Yussef Ismail Mahmud al-Baba, 32, died in hospital where he had been taken several days ago.

(Contd on Pg. 14)

President Receives Qatari Foreign Minister



Photo: Mojtaba Yakin

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN -- Visiting Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad ibn Jassem Bin Jaber al-Thani here yesterday met with President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and submitted the message of the Emir of Qatar to him.

Referring to the historical relations enjoyed by Iran and Qatar, the Qatari foreign minister said that his country is eager to expand ties in all possible fields with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He added that Qatar's foreign policy is based on upgrading ties with Iran and that Tehran-Doha relations could serve as an example of cordial relations that may be developed among other regional countries.

Al-Thani reiterated that his country attaches great importance to the measures taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and preservation of peace and stability in the strategic and sensitive Persian Gulf region.

He underlined that Iran's efforts have had a positive influence in developments in the region, particularly the thwarting of outside infiltrators.

President Rafsanjani, for his part, stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran is strongly determined to boost cooperation with neighboring coutries of the Persian Gulf.

The president stressed that the enemies of Islam, particularly the global powers of arrogance, aim to justify their illegitimate presence

(Contd on Pg.14)

Iran Strategic Role in Middle East Stressed

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN -- French Foreign Ministry's Director General for Middle East and North Africa, Jean-Claude Cousseran, here Saturday lauded Iran's decisive role in the Middle East and described as indispensable the role it played to solve the crisis in Southern Lebanon.

He made the remark in a meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister for Euro-American Affairs Mahmoud Vaezi.

Underscoring his country's independent policy, Cousseran said that Paris is eager to upgrade bilateral ties with Tehran.

He further expressed satisfaction over Tehran-Paris political, economic and cultural relations and called for continuation of cooperation in the future.

Vaezi stressed that the two countries are desirous for promoting cordial relations and that confidence is one of the main principles creation of which will pave the way for the two nations to boost their ties in the future.

He said that key measures have been taken in recent years for promoting Tehran-Paris cooperation and that the exchange of visits between the two countries' officials will pave the way for more political, economic and cultural relations between the two countries.

Taleban Admit Difficulty With Poppy Clampdown

KABUL -- Impoverished Afghans are growing poppies to feed themselves in economically frustrated and war-torn Afghanistan, Taleban officials admitted Saturday.

Although Afghanistan faces international pressure to stamp out the cultivation of poppies, from which heroin is extracted, Information and Culture Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said it would not be easy.

"It is evident that to ban poppy cultivation is a difficult job (while) the problem of Afghanistan is not solved thoroughly," he said, adding some people were living off the proceeds of poppy growing because the economy was paralyzed, and factories had been destroyed.

"Notwithstanding all these problems, we want to seriously struggle against this menace," Muttaqi promised.

U.S. assistant secretary of state, Robin Raphel, during a recent tour of the region, reportedly expressed her government's concern over poppy growing in Afghanistan.

Muttaqi claimed the narcotics business had dropped since the Taleban militia took control of more than two-thirds of the country last September.

(AFP)

Problems Mount for Troubled Milosevic

BELGRADE -- With the opposition looking ahead to an era without him, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's woes deepened Saturday as teachers threatened a general strike and violence flared again in a province seeking independence.

Students and other pro-democracy demonstrators geared up to hit the streets for the 74th day in a row in what has snowballed into the biggest challenge yet to Milosevic's 10-year rule.

And despite a recent rash of hints at concessions or at least dialogue, the government remained tight-lipped.

One of the opposition leaders, Zoran Djindjic, offered a first brief glimpse of his movement's political and economic agenda if it unseats Milosevic in elections due by the end of this year.

In an interview with the news-

(Contd on Pg.14)

Sudan Welcomes UAE Mediation in Fighting

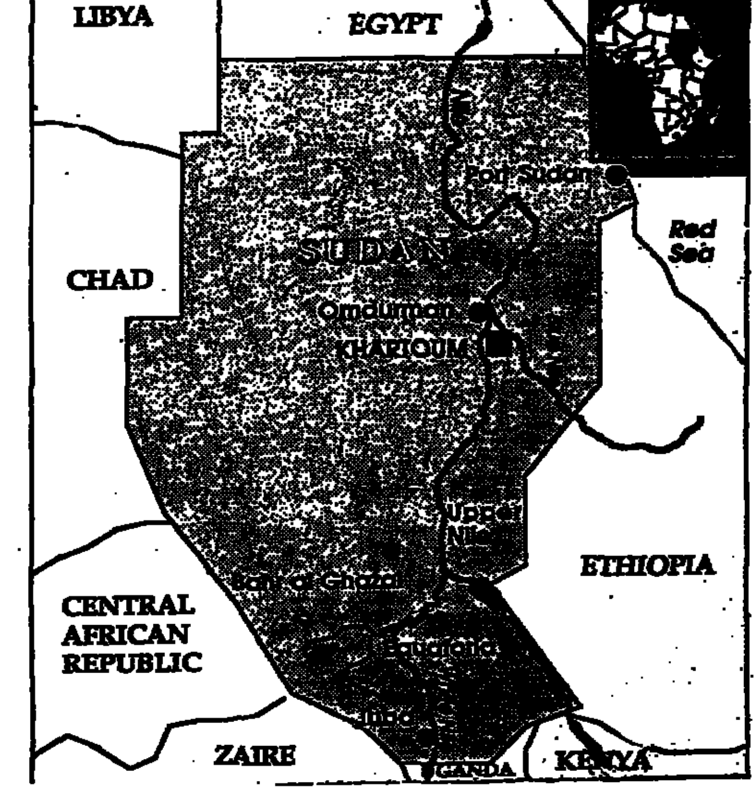
BEIRUT -- A senior Sudanese official was quoted as saying on Saturday that his government welcomed an offer by the United Arab Emirates to mediate in Khartoum's war with armed opposition groups.

Salah Karrar, minister in charge of presidential affairs, was reported in the Saudi newspaper *Asharq al-Awsat* as saying that Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir had a telephone conversation on Thursday with his UAE counterpart, Sheikh Zayed ibn Sultan al-Nahyan.

Bashir voiced "Sudan's favorable welcome to his initiative," Karrar said, adding, "as a result, Sheikh Zayed is to send an emissary to Sudan to begin discussions."

Karrar said that Sudan's military-Islamic lead government "posed no conditions for opening the talks" with opposition leaders, notably Sadeq al-Mahdi and Mohammad Osman al-Mirghani.

But he stressed that they "should adopt patriotic positions by ending support for Ethiopian aggression, and by demanding that Ethiopia withdraw its troops from Sudanese territory."



Khartoum has accused Ethiopia and Eritrea of militarily supporting the Sudanese opposition and of having deployed troops on Sudanese territory, allowing the rebels to control a large area in the southeast of the country.

Sudanese opposition groups will meet in Eritrea next month to consider the UAE initiative to end the fighting in Sudan, an opposition spokesman said on Friday.

Osman al-Mirghani, political

(Contd on Pg.14)

Annan to Meet With Middle East Leaders at Davos

DAVOS, Switzerland -- UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Friday he expects to be briefed on the Middle East peace process this weekend by Israeli, Egyptian and Palestinian leaders.

The UN chief confirmed he has meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

"It think we will obviously touch on the Middle East peace situation and the UN troops on the

(Contd on Pg.14)

China Slams U.S. Human Rights Report as "Distortion"

BEIJING -- China on Saturday reacted angrily to criticisms in this week's U.S. government report on human rights, accusing Washington of "distorting" the facts and interfering in its internal affairs.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Tang Guoqiang said China "is firmly opposed" to the report, as it had always protected and promoted human rights in accordance with the country's laws and constitution.

"China enjoys political stability, economic growth, social progress and national unity, and the Chinese people live and work in peace and contentment," the official Xinhua news agency quoted him as saying.

He said this proved that the government's policy of putting "rights of survival and development" first was best for China.

Beijing has frequently argued that for a developing country, questions like human rights cannot take precedence over poverty eradication.

"The U.S. government distorted ... China's human rights situation in disregard of abovementioned facts, which gravely runs counter to the basic norms governing international relations," Tang said.

"The U.S. side must stop its erroneous actions of interfering in China's internal affairs with the excuse of the human rights issue."

The fracas over the report comes at a challenging moment in Sino-U.S. relations.

(AFP)

Harmonious Islamic Entities Nominate Nateq Nouri for President

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN -- On the occasion of the February 10 anniversary of the Islamic Revolution victory and the International Qods Day, the Harmonious Islamic Entities (HIE) issued a statement in which Majlis Speaker Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri has been nominated as candidate for the presidency in the forthcoming presidential elections to be held in July.

The statement said that the HIE, following careful examination in the past few months, has

(Contd on Pg.14)

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In the Name of God

And remember your Lord within yourself humbly and fearing and in a voice not loud in the morning and the evening, and be not of the heedless ones.

(HOLY QORAN) (7:205)

OPINION

Peace Process at the End of Its Rope

An Israeli soldier yesterday shot at innocent Palestinians injuring seven people in a protest to the handover of the West Bank city of Al-Khalil (Hebron) to the Palestinian Authority.

The incident happened at a time when negotiations on the status of Al-Khalil are still continuing and no concrete decision has been taken in this regard. Besides, the coalition members of the ruling Likud Party are not unanimous in the handover of the city to the Palestinian Authority.

Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, a staunch advocate of annexing all the Biblical Hebrew's lands, and five other ministers of the ruling coalition refused on Monday to support Premier Netanyahu on the question of the status of Al-Khalil. At the same time, the far-right opposition Moledet Party submitted a no-confidence motion in the ruling party. In additin to such moves, another 15 deputies of the ruling coalition, who also oppose the accord on the handover of Al-Khalil to the Palestinians, expressed abstention. Netanyahu, for his part, has threatened to form a coalition government with the Labor Party.

As it seems, the situation is deteriorating rapidly in Israel. Until today, the Palestinians at least knew whom they should talk to. Although Netanyahu himself is an extremist with strong anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian views, the Palestinians could so far, to some extent, count on the negotiations.

Netanyahu's government is indeed in a precarious impasse now. The Israeli prime minister has turned out to be an impotent figure in Israel's political scene. As a result, the Palestinians are virtually left in bewilderment.

The Likud government is not trustworthy because it is not the one that can call the shots. It is clear that a bunch of extremists and fundamentalist fanatics are the actual decision-makers in Israel today.

The so-called peace process has reached real deadlock. In other words, there is no practical way out of the present situation. The Palestinians should now realize that there can be no peace with the expansionist Zionist regime. Therefore, they had better find an alternative to the so-called peace process.

Iran's Embassy Refutes Russian Daily Comments

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Iran's Embassy in Moscow in a statement on Tuesday condemned futile comments by a Russian daily that Tehran-Moscow relations are against the agreements already reached between Russia and the U.S., IRNA reported.

In its last week issue, *Segodnya* commenting on the recent visit of Russian Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, to Iran wrote that although Russia does not consider its military cooperation with Iran contrary to U.S. interests, it is likely that the American authorities are concerned over such a cooperation between Iran and Russia.

Iran and Russia, as independent and neighboring states, have established their bilateral ties on the basis of mutual interests, the statement stressed adding. Russia is not obliged to formulate its relations with other countries according to U.S. interests.

The paper had also claimed that Tehran-Moscow relations may create problems in Moscow-Washington ties.

The statement further deplored the absurd remarks of the paper on the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf and said that such unfounded remarks stem from total ignorance about historical facts and documents.

President Addresses Local People of Dehloran, Ilam

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani addressed a large group of people in Dehloran, Ilam Province, on Tuesday.

The president said that he was happy to observe that despite the hardship of the war years, the people of Dehloran have an active presence on different scenes.

According to IRNA, he added that he had also visited the border town of Moussian in the province and that he was equally impressed by seeing the people in the latter city continue their life with renewed enthusiasm after the war.

President Rafsanjani said that as his administration implemented agro and irrigation projects, Ilam Province of Iran would further develop agriculturally and industrially.

Rafsanjani in Dehloran Tuesday inaugurated a vocational and professional school. The school occupies an area of 10,000 square meters and has six workshops. It has been built with an initial capital investment of Rls.1,815 million.

The President also attended a meeting of local administrative council telling them that he was confident that national infrastructural projects would be complete in just a few years time after which, he said, the future administrations would be able to address their attention to other issues.

He said Ilam Province had a very high level of security for which he appreciated the Law Enforcement Forces of the province. In the same meeting, Governor Geneal of Ilam Province Ali Akbar Shabanifard, and Majlis Deputy from Mehran, Ilam Province, Ahmad Nasseri Gohar offered a summary report to President Rafsanjani on the projects undertaken in the province, dwelling also on the problems that had to be solved at the provincial level.

Habibi's New Year Greetings to World Christians

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — The Iranian First Vice President Hassan Habibi cabled message of greetings to the world Christians on the occasion of New Year.

In his message he expressed hope that 1977 will be the year of constructive cooperation among all countries and the freedom loving people of the world to uproot tyranny and corruption.

He also hoped that the New Year will be the year of elimination of tension and establishment of peace, security, justice and year of protection of human rights away from discrimination.

Habibi in conclusion expressed hope that 1997 be the year of respect for nations ano their legitimate rights.

Uzbek Ambassador Submits Credentials to Velayati

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — The new Uzbek Ambassador to Tehran Abdul Samad Heidarov submitted his credentials to Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati here on Wednesday.

At the meeting, Velayati said that the boosting of relations between the two countries and expansion of cooperation with the regional states will contribute to stability and security of the region. He also pointed out the two countries' membership in Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the UN and expressed hope for the expansion of mutual cooperation.

The Iranian foreign minister also underlined the religious, cultural and historcial commonalities shared by Iran and Uzbekistan, saying that these factors help boost bilateral relations.

The Uzbek ambassador, in turn, stressed his country's interest in strengthening bilateral relations and cordial ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran. He noted that Iran is one of the most prominent countries in the region, with which Uzbekistan wishes to have stronger relations and more extensive cooperation in different areas.

Heidarov added that Uzbekistan hopes to see the regional crises settled and further voiced his country's support for the negotiations aimed at restoring peace to Tajikistan.

ICCO Head Felicitates Christians on New Year

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — The head of Islamic Culture and Communication Organization (ICCO) Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, in a statement faxed to the *Tehran Times* here yesterday, felicitated the Christians in Iran and other countries throughout the world on the Christian New Year.

In his statement, the hojjatoleslam noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran has in the past few years been holding constructive dialogues with the followers of Christianity in order to revive the moral and religious instructions of the divine prophets, which are the only cure to the problems facing the nations. It is hoped that such talks will bring about the resurgence of moral principles and protect the nations against the atheistic cultural aggression of the global paganism.

He quoted late leader of Islamic Revolution Imam Khomeini as saying, "If the teachings of the divine prophets such as Prophet Jesus Christ (AS), Prophet Moses (AS), and Prophet Mohammad (S) were completely observed by the Christians, Jews and Muslims respectively, the nations would not be suffering from the problems that are facing them today." Hojjatoleslam Taskhiri further extended his congratulations on the birth anniversary of Prophet Jesus Christ (AS), which was celebrated recently.



TASKHIRI

Islamic Values Should Be Observed in Development Plans

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Majlis Speaker Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri said here on Wednesday that the Islamic values should be given due attention by the government executives who make plans for the country's development.

Addressing a group of students from theological schools in several provinces, the speaker added that the mere development will be insufficient when not accompanied by exercising social justice and disseminating the Islamic culture. Fortunately, the government officials are well aware of this fact and pay due attention in this regard, he noted.

Nateq Nouri further stressed the need for Islamization of the universities, saying that the presence of theologians in centers of the higher education will help to achieve the above objective.

Iran's New Representative in ECO Appointed

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — The Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati appointed Nasrollah Kazemi Kamyab as the permanent representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

Kamyab is also director-general of the Foreign Ministry's bureau for ECO-related affairs.

Iran-Russia Statement Published as UN Document

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Iran-Russia joint statement on Tajikistan was published as a ducument of the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday, IRNA reported from New York.

The joint statement was issued at the end of the two-day talks in Tehran of foreign ministers Ali Akbar Velayati of Iran and Yevgeni Primakov of Russia December 22-23.

The foreign ministers considered holding talks between the belligerent parties on the basis of safeguarding the interests of all political groups and of the principle of granting reciprocal concessions as the only way to restore peace to Tajikistan.

In a letter to the UN Secretary General Boutrus Boutrus Ghali, Russian representative to the UN Sergei Lavrov and Iran's Deputy Representative Majid Takht Ravanchi had called for the publication of the joint statement.

Ambassador Meets Turkmen FM

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Iranian Ambassador to Turkmenistan Mehdi Mirabutalebi met with the Turkmen Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Boris Sheikhmoradov, in Ashkhabad Tuesday.

The Iranian diplomat delivered a message from Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati to Sheikhmoradov. The two officials also discussed regional issues and bilateral relations.

Qazvin to Turn Into the 27th Province of Iran

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — The northern city of Qazvin is to be turned into a province, Majlis approved the bill here Wednesday.

According to an IRNA report, the province will comprise Qazvin, as the capital, Boeen Zahra, Alamout and Roudbar districts and Tarom-e Sofla, Avaj and Abyek towns.

Covering 14,570 square km, the province borders Alborz Mountain Range in the north and the Qazvin Plain in the south.

The southwestern and northern parts of the province have a mountainous weather with cold winters and moderate summers while the central and southern parts have arid and semi-arid climate.

Ambassador Calls On Lebanese Mufti

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Iran's Ambassador to Beirut, Homayoun Alizadeh met with the Lebanese Mufti Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Tabani on Tuesday.

In his meeting, Alizadeh expressed hope that the Muslims world over set aside all differences and neutralize divisive devices of the enemies of Muslims, an IRNA report said.

He also congratulated Tabani for his appointment as mufti of Lebanon.

In another meeting with the archbishop of the Orthodox Christians of Beirut Eliass Oudeh, the Iranian ambassador congratulated him on the occasion of the New Year's D ay.

Iraqi Kurdish Refugees Return Home From Kermanshah

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — The last group Iraqi Kurdish refugees residing Tapeh Rash Refugee Camp in S e Pol-e Zahab, western Iran, turned to their home country in past few days, IRNA quoted an formed source as saying.

An official at the provin Organization for Expatriates Refugees Affairs added that a the departure of the last grou refugees the Tapeh Rash Refu Camp was dismantled.

Oil Prices Confound Pundits Again in 1996

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - The evident strength in oil prices has continued to confound pundits right up to the end of 1996 with rates staying firm on the prospect of prolonged freezing weather in Europe and the U.S. The UK's benchmark Brent blend rose to 23.70 dollars per barrel (dpb) Monday to leave prices averaging at more than 20 dpb for the year, well above the 1995 average of 17.20 and far more than analysts predicted for 1996, IRNA reported from London.

No one forecast any sustained price increases 12 months ago, where predictions were commonly estimated below 1995 rates. Some even warned that prices could drop as low as 5 dpb if Iraqi oil returned to the market.

Although rates rose above 19 dpb early in 1996, reports that Iraq wanted to conclude a limited UN oil-for-food deal caused prices to fall by up o 3 dollars.

By the time of Iraq's return in December, oil's strength was already underpinned by a shortfall in stocks, more buoyant than expected world demand and the failure of huge rises in non-OPEC production to fully materialize as predicted.

Analysts have continued to be very conservative in their price forecasts for 1997, again throwing caution to the wind by suggesting rates are more likely to decline than stay strong and even dive by the second half of the year.

Zagros Development Project Covers 16 Provinces

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - The Zagros Development Plan which covers 16 provinces of the country comprises projects in the fields of dam building, gas, oil, agriculture, livestock breeding, fisheries, roads and transport, telecommunication and cultural and educational affairs.

It covers the entire or part of the provinces of West Azarbaijan, East Azarbaijan, Kurdestan, Zanjan, Kermanshah, Hamedan, Central, Lorestan, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Isfahan, Khuzestan, Ilam, Kohkiloyeh-Boyer Ahmad, Fars, Hormuzgan and Kerman, IRNA reported.

The project will cover 83 cities, 34,059 villages with a total population of 16 million. Being implemented on an area with a length of 1760 kms and width of about 200 kms, it covers one fifth of the country.

A total of 150 billion cubic meters of water from annal rainfall is accumulated in the Zagros area, that is 30 percent of the total rainfall of the country.

Furthermore 50 billion cubic meters of water flow into the area, equal to 40 percent of the flowing water in the country.

The project includes 68 large and small dams which are either constructed or are under construction.

With a capacity of about 25 billion cubic meters, the dams can provide water for irrigation of at least 1.5 million hectares of farmlands.

Hamedan and Yazd Export 1813 Tons of Farm Products

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - Some 932 tons of various agricultural products were exported from Yazd province, centeral Iran, in the past nine months, it was announced Wednesday.

Amir Saqafi, head of provincial agricultural organization added that the exports showed an increase of 43 percent compared to the corresponding period last year, IRNA reported.

Dates, pomegranate, grapefruit, raisin, pistachio, walnut, dried fruit and henna were among major items exported to Russia, Switzerland, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Australia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Lebanon, Moldova, Czech, and Dubai, Saqafi said.

Meanwhile, some 881 tons of garlic were also exported from the western province of Hamedan in the past nine months.

Abdulhossein Habibi, head of provincial institute of standard and industrial research added that the products were exported to the Unitaed Arab Emirates (UAE), Romania, Armenia and Kuwait.

Relatively Rosy Prospects for Stock Market Next Year: Analysts

SEOUL — prospects of the stock market for the coming year are relatively bright, as far as long-term market trends are concerned.

The market will bottom out during the year's first half and will then begin to rally along with the economy in the second half.

Investors, disappointed with the stock market crash towards the end of the year, are now concerned about the level of the bottom. How far will it fall and when will it rebound?

Analysts dare say the bottom Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) level will be somewhere between 600 and 700 points.

This year, the market suffered a plunge of 26.7 percent in terms of the KOSPI, one of the worst showings in its history. It closed the year at 651.22 points, down more than a third of the year's high of 986.84 registered on May 7.

The slowing economy, an oversupply of shares and such external market factors as the political controversy and industrial unrest over the ruling party's railroading the labor reform bills through parliament in December, have been blamed for the poor performance.

The slowing economy, marked by the deceleration of its growth pace from nine percent in 1995 to the estimated 6.5 percent for the passing year, caused three companies listed in the first division of the stock market to go bankrupt — Woosung Construction, Kunyoung and Samick Musical Instruments.

The market was brisk in May, sending the KOSPI upwards closer to the 1,000-point level, and the government announced plans to supply new shares worth no less than 2.5 trillion won in the third quarter.

Investors have had to worry about a glut of shares through the end of the year.

In addition, financial scandals, including those which led to the arrests of a former defense minister, a banker and an incumbent head of the Securities Watchdog Agency, poured cold water over the market. (IRNA)

3.8m Tons of Processed Steel Produced Since March

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - A total of 3,850,000 tons of processed steel were produced between March 20 and December 20, said deputy head of National Iranian Steel Company in charge of plan and budget affairs Mousa Aqaie-Lankarani here on Wednesday.

Talking to IRNA, Aqaie-Lankarani said the company has managed to attain 93 percent of its pre-determined targets.

He said that six million tons of steel are expected to be produced by end of the year on March 20, 1997.

He added that 1,146,170 tons of iron bars, 829,427 tons of rods, 33,770 tons of pipes, 77,377 tons of junctions and 144,350 tons of slabs were produced by his company between March 20 and December 20, 1996.

Nissan Motor to Make Pulsar in Britain

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - Nissan Motor Co. will begin producing the Pulsar small passenger car at its British plant in March 2000, the *Nihon Kogyo Shimbun* said Wednesday, as quoted by an IRNA-Kyodo-OANA dispatch.

At an estimated investment of 5 billion to 10 billion yen, Nissan Motor Manufacturing (U.K.) Ltd. in Sunderland, will make three- and five-door Pulsars at a combined annual rate of 100,000 vehicles, the industrial daily said.

The Pulsar is the second-best selling Nissan car in Europe, following the March. The addition of the model to the Nissan production list at the British unit is to try to turn around its European car business, which is currently operating at a loss, the paper said.

Nissan sold around 450,000 vehicles in Europe in the latest year, commanding the largest share among Japanese automakers.

However, sales have been slumping in the past several years with the latest figure lower than the peak 540,000 vehicles registered in 1991, the paper said.

British production of the Pulsar is expected to raise Nissan's local output ratio in Europe in terms of overall sales to nearly 90 percent from the current 70 percent, which would help reduce exchange losses by wild currency fluctuations, the paper said.

Banks Offer New Instrument

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - Major commercial banks and securities houses plan to jointly offer a new financial instrument combining a checking account and investment trust, possibly in 1998, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper said Wednesday.

The instrument, sometimes known as a cash management account in the United States, is a product responding to the planned "big bang" financial deregulation recently announced by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, the *National Daily* said, as quoted by an IRNA-Kyodo-OANA dispatch.

The account has a settlement function for deposits up to a certain ceiling, while sums beyond the ceiling will be automatically invested in bonds and other securities, the paper said.

Mini-Hydroelectric Plants to Be Introduced

RIAU, Singapore - Riau's development planning board is considering introducing mini-hydroelectric plants to this province, a board official said.

Head of the board's research division, Rocskin Har, said here Saturday the plants will make use of small rivers flowing through the villages in the province.

He said that at present, the board is assessing the feasibility of constructing these mini-hydroelectric plants and that a Singaporean investor had already expressed interest in constructing them. (IRNA)

N. Sumatra — PT Pelab Uhan Indonesia (Pelindo-I) in the coming fiscal year (1997-1998) plans to invest rp 11.3 billion for the upgrading and rehabilitation of facilities in various seaports in North Sumatra.

These funds will be allocated for a project which covers dredging of port basins, coastal reclamation as well as pier and warehouse rehabilitation, PT Pelindo-I's spokesman Hasyim Lubis said here at the weekend.

11 State Higher Educational Institutions Seek to Be Privatized in Mongolia

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - In conjunction with 1997 plans for education reform 11 state higher educational institutions have applied to the state property committee for permission to be privatized in Mongolia.

According to a project drawn up by the committee with the help of the World Bank the institutions will be turned into non-commercial private organizations, an IRNA-MONTSAME-OANA dispatch reported from Ulaanbaatar.

The schools will be privatized by tender.

The committee in conjunction with the Enlightenment Ministry will choose winners in the tender.

Real estate on the properties will be privatized on a gratis basis as long as the buildings are used for educational purposes.

The first institution to be privatized is likely to be the Financial-Economical University of Ulaanbaatar, one of the most prestigious institutions in Mongolia. Graduates of that school are in great demand and the committee believes it can get along without state financial support.

The state higher educational system consists of 7 universities, 4 institutes and colleges, in which a total of 27,000 students are enrolled.

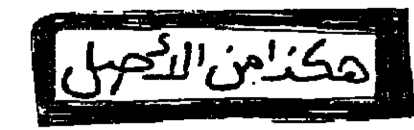
Excluding Mongolian state University, all are subject to privatization.

Industries Contribute 18 Percent to GDP

TEHRAN — Share of industries in gross domestic product (GDP) is currently 18 percent and is expected to reach 25 percent by the end of the Second Development Plan (1995-1999).

Minister of industries Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh further said on Sunday that the share was 10 percent during the 1980-88 Iraqi imposed war.

Stressing importance of industrial design and its role in development, he said, "So far 800 design engineering units, 80 research and renovation companies as well as 500 research and development centers have been set up at various factories. (IRNA)



Spiderman's Publisher Seeks Bankruptcy Protection

NEW YORK — Marvel Entertainment Group, the comic book publisher whose stable of super-heroes includes Spiderman, filed for protection in bankruptcy court last Friday.

Under the plan submitted to the court, Marvel would embark on a 525-million-dollar recapitalization campaign in a bid to end three years of tough economic times.

In November, Marvel trimmed its work force by 115 workers, or a third of its staff.

By diluting the capital held by the public, the plan is expected to increase the clout of investor Ron Perelman, who already holds about 80 percent of Marvel's common stock.

Perelman sought chapter 11 court protection because the holders of bonds issued by Marvel's holding companies — among them financier Carl Icahn — could not agree on a reorganization plan.

"We would have preferred to recapitalize Marvel without having to seek the aid of the court, but the actions and positions taken by the bondholders prevented that approach," said Scott Sassa, chairman and chief executive officer of Marvel, in a statement.

Under the plan, Marvel would get 365 million dollars in New Capital from Andrews Group, Perelman's investment fund. In exchange, Marvel's creditors would provide 160 million dollars to finance a strategic investment plan.

Marvel said it would honor all its debts and maintain normal credit terms with its suppliers and licensors.

The filing does not affect Marvel's Panini subsidiary based in Italy, or its restaurant activities.

Toy Biz, another subsidiary, also continues to be independently listed on the stock exchange.

Marvel was at 2. 37 per share Thursday on Wall Street. (AFP)

Developer Molds Collection Encompassing History of Modern Sculpture

DALLAS —Art history textbook pages come alive in Ray Nasher's yard. Each day as the millionaire real-estate developer looks out any of the large, picture windows of his north Dallas home, he sees the three-dimensional sculptures of Henry Moore, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso that some only view on the flat page of a book.

His Muqeum-style home seems miniature when compared to the famous sculptures that surround it in an 8-acre (3-hectare) sculpture garden that neighbors casually jog around.

Although Nasher has poured himself into creating just the right home for himself and his art collection, he is now exploring options for a new perfect setting. One option is Dallas' Museum of Art. However, other cities are also chipping at the chance to have part or all of the $250 million historical sculpture collection that includes more than 300 pieces that span works from Rodin through Joel Shapiro. The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Tate Gallery in London and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City have all expressed interest. "The collection is without question the most important privately held collection of modern sculpture in the world," said Dr. William B. Jordan, an art historian who recently retired as deputy director of Fort Worth's Kimbell Art Museum.

Dallas city manager John Ware recognizes the collection's importance and doesn't plan to let his city miss the opportunity.

This August, Dallas approved a $250,000 study to build an arts district home for Nasher's Medley.

"Dallas will overnight become world class in the art world," Ware said. But Nasher isn't promising anything just yet. He wants to make sure his collection is maintained and housed properly.

If that can be achieved along with finding a way for his collection to become the core of an advanced center of the study of modern sculpture, there is a strong possibility Texas will remain the historical collection's home. "Dallas is so important to U.S. because this is where we live. And this is where we raised our family and our business, and (where) we developed the collection," he said. "So, it would be nice to be able to have it properly acquired into the community."

Jordan, who first urged Nasher and his late wife, Patsy, to display their collection in southern Methodist University's gallery, said the collection would be an important cultural addition to any community.

"The importance of the collection lies in its breadth and its depths," he said. "This is a collection of references. This is the collection the scholars will always have to refer to and study and use as a point of comparison."

The Nashers didn't even realize the importance of their possessions until Jordan approached them in the late 1970s. "They were a little hesitant at first whether their collection was worth showing," he said, but "it turned out to be just spectacular."

And the small exposure was enough to take the Nashers' collection around the world after its meager beginnings in the 1950s during archaeological digs in Colombia.

Since the early 1980s, parts of the collection have been featured in Madrid, London, Tel Aviv, Berlin, Venice and New York.

"We never really thought about a collection per se ... that was not our goal," Nasher said. "We just determined that it would be fun from an educational point of view for our children and from an aesthetic point of view for ourselves."

The hobby that began four decades ago with $5 and $10 sculptures has grown into a multimillion-dollar accumulation. Included in the collection is Rodin's "*Eve,*" Picasso's *Head*, Matisse's "*Large Seated Nude,*" Brancusi's "*The kiss,*" Joan Miro's "*Moonbird*" Alberto Giacometti's bust of his brother.

"We just selected pieces that we wanted to live with, and that we loved ourselves," Nasher said. "With our good fortune they really turned out to be important works." But now, Nasher wants to share the complete collection with the public. Normally only a portion of the collection is featured at a showing.

"He's very generous in terms of loans, but he doesn't relish having this many works out at one time," said Steven Nash, chief curator of fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, where about 73 pieces of the collection are currently on display.

Early next year, 110 of Nasher's pieces will appear at New York's Guggenheim.

When pieces are on loan, Nasher feels as if his home is partially bare. So, he visits the showings whenever he can break away.

"It's fun to just sit and watch the people as they relate to the works of art," he said. "It's fun to listen, you know, them not knowing who you are."

(AP)

Supplication of Kumayl

8

Would that I knew, my Master,
my Allah and my Protector,
whether You will give the fire
dominion over faces
fallen down prostrate before Your Greatness;
tongues voicing sincerely
the profession of Your Oneness and
giving thanks to You in praise;
hearts acknowledging Your divinity
through verification;
minds encompassing knowledge of You
until they have become humble;
and limbs speeding to the places
of Your worship in obedience and
entreating Your forgiveness in submission.
No such opinion is held of You!
Nor has such been reported — thanks to
Your Bounty — concerning You,
O All-Generous!
My Lord, and You know my weakness
before a little of this world's
tribulations and punishments and
before those ordeals which befall its dwellers,
even though it is a tribulation and ordeal
whose stay is short,
whose subsistence is but little and
whose period is but fleeting.

German Tourist Stealing Ancient Frescoes Caught Red Handed

SELCUK, Turkey — A German tourist trying to steal frescoes from the ancient city of Ephesus was caught in the act and arrested, a report said Tuesday.

Manfred Lehmann, 66, was spotted with a hammer trying to break free frescoes on a column in front of a library built in 135, the Anatolia News Agency said.

Lehmann, who also picked some marble pieces in Ephesus, was released pending trial on charges of attempting to smuggle ancient artifacts out of the country. No trial date has been set yet.

Ephesus lies just outside Selcuk, about 90 kilometers (56 miles) south of the Aegean Port of Izmir.

(AP)

Egypt Says It Is Happy With French Restoration Work

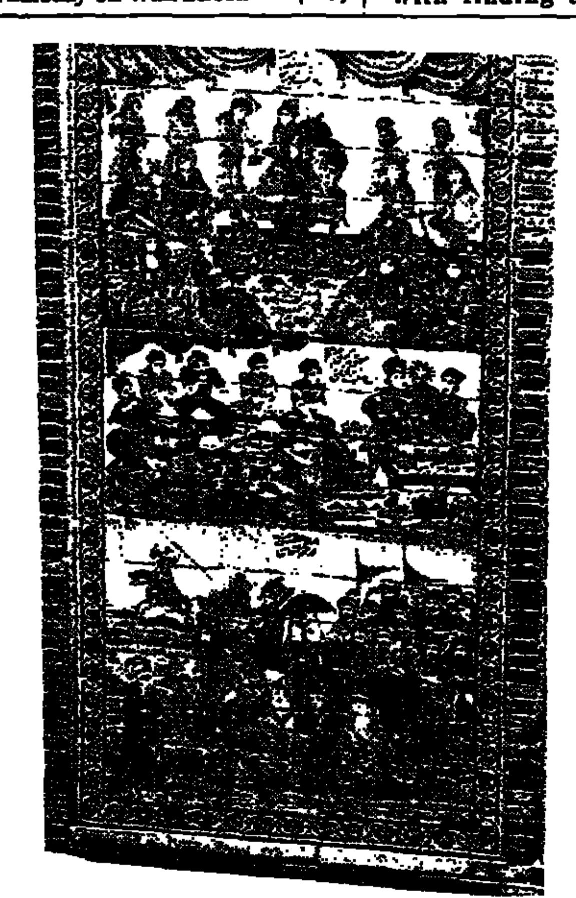
LUXOR, Egypt —An Egyptian commission of inquiry said it was satisfied with the way in which a French team was conducting restoration work at the temples of Karnak in Luxor, southern Egypt.

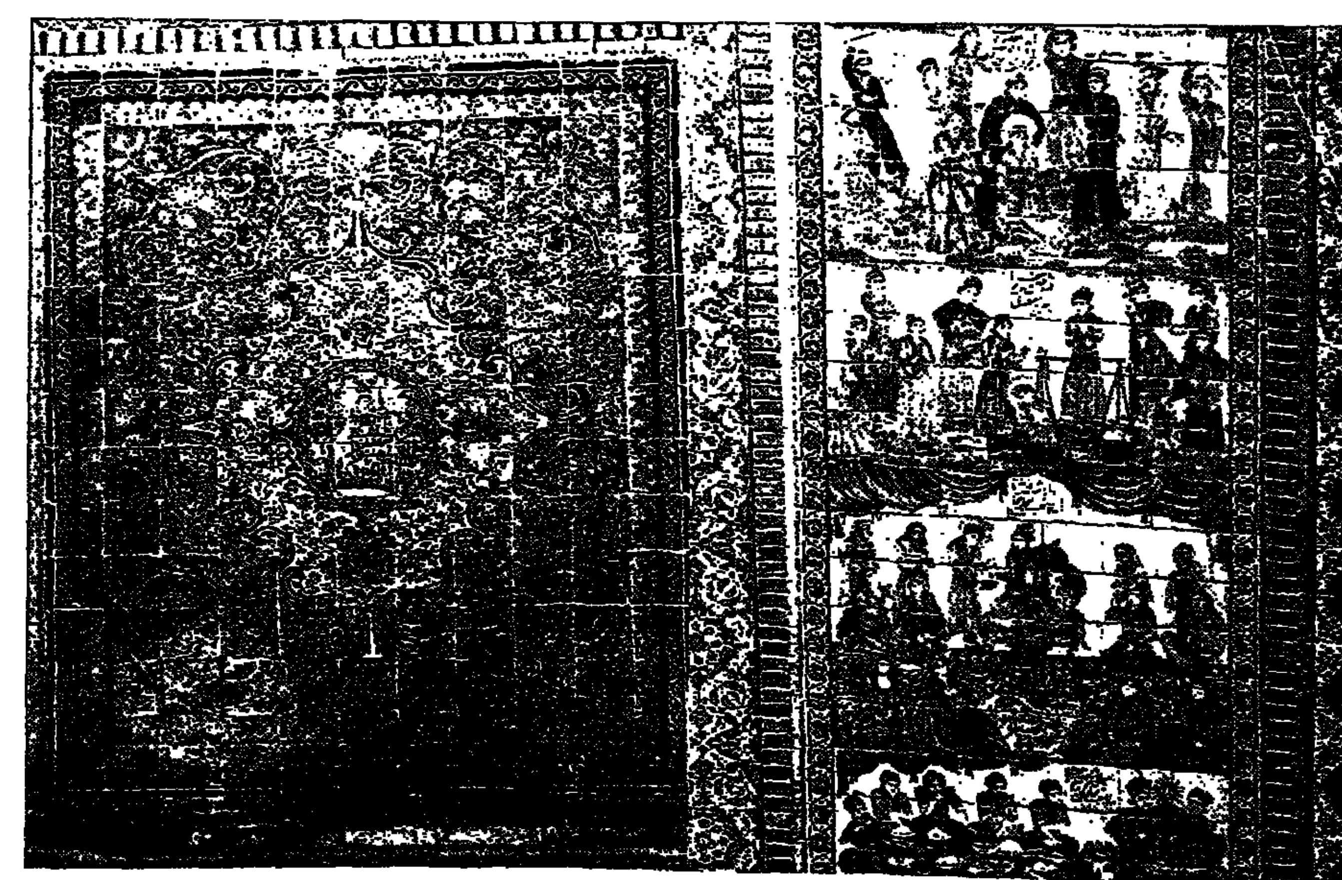
The commission was set up to examine complaints about the quality of the archeological work by the Karnak French Egyptian center and comes amid recent criticism by Egypt's antiquities chief of foreign archeological projects.

Commission member Hossam Eddin Abdel Hamid said the initial conclusion from the investigation was that the French team's work was "100 percent correct." The center "has had recourse to the most sophisticated restoration technology ... And has relied in its work on the most recent and most authentic scientific studies," Hamid told reporters.

Karnak antiquities inspecto[r] Sayyeda Abdel Radi in Karnak had accused the center of using harmful materials such as blac[k] cement for its restoration wor[k] and of damaging some archeological pieces.

Earlier this month, Ali Hassa[n] the new secretary general of th[e] Higher Antiquities Council, accused staff on foreign archeological projects of using digs fo[r] personal or commercial gain. (A[P])





TEHRAN — Kermanshah, a historic city in the western part of Iran has inherited many historical monuments as covered bazaar, caravanserai, arcades, mosques, *takaya* and *hosseinyehs*. The decoration of the said attractions are very beautiful, specially the tile-works. One is Mo'avenolmolk Tekiyeh which is located at the center of Kermanshah. It was built some time about 1890 A.D. In the years that saw the height of Constitutional Movement at the turn of the century, the Tekiyeh was destroyed. Later, however, in 1910, the Tekiyeh was restored.

Daily Food for Thoug[ht]

On Action

Actions of the last age ar[e] like almanacs of the las[t] year.

SIR JOHN DENHA[M]
The Sop[hy]



SPORTS SUMMARY

Tehran Times Service

TENNIS

Philippoussis Destroys French Hopes

PERTH, Australia: The explosive serves of Australia's Mark Philippoussis Tuesday destroyed France in the 800,000 Australian-dollar (U. S. $640,000) Hopman Cup Tennis mixed team tournament.

After a promising start for France when Mary Pierce whipped Nicole Bradtke, Philippoussis' merciless assault overwhelmed Guy Forget in the men's singles and proved the lethal factor in the decisive mixed doubles.

Australia's 2-1 win in the crucial tie means the unseeded home nation still have some chance of playing in the final Saturday, while fourth-seeded France, still to play title holders Croatia, are out of contention for Major Honors.

France have lost their first two ties in the tournament — going down to the United States 2-1 in the first round.

Medvedev Joins Kafelnikov as First Round Casualty

ADELAIDE, Australia: Andrei Medvedev joined Jevgeny Kafelnikov as a seeded casualty in the first round of the U.S.$328,000 Australian Hardcourt Tennis Championship at memorial drive here Tuesday.

The Ukrainian third seed finished the year on a dismal note falling to American Jonathan Stark in straight sets.

Medvedev showed little fight in a 6-1, 6-1 thrashing by Stark in further bad news for tournament organizers following Monday's demise of top seed and French Open champion Kafelnikov.

The world No. 3 Russian was dumped from the tournament in just 49 minutes by Swede Mikael Tillstrom, 6-2, 6-2.

Four seeds out in first round of New Zealand Women's Tennis

AUCKLAND: The International Women's Tennis Tournament here Tuesday lived up to its reputation as no respecter of form with four seeds out in the first round of the U.S.$107,500 ASB Bank Classic.

Austrians Barbara Schett (fourth) and Karin Kschwendt (seventh), Belgium's Dominique van Roost (sixth) and Frenchwoman Alexandra Fusai (eighth) fell at the first hurdle as sunshine replaced cyclone Fergus's torrential rain which canceled Monday's play.

The biggest surprise was Schett's 6-4 6-4 loss to German 16-year-old Marlene Weingartner making only her second appearance in the main draw of a WTA Tour event thanks to a wildcard.

Bruguera Sprints Past Stich

DOHA: Sergi Bruguera, Spain's former dual French Open champion, caused the upset of the day here on Tuesday eliminating fourth seed Michael Stich 6-3, 6-1 in the 625,000-dollar ATP Tournament.

Bruguera, who slipped to 81 in the world this year after a series of injuries, was a revelation against Stich, the 1991 Wimbledon champion, on a surface that is usually considered too fast for him.

"It sounds surprising but Bruguera was too fast for me today," Stich said.

FOOTBALL

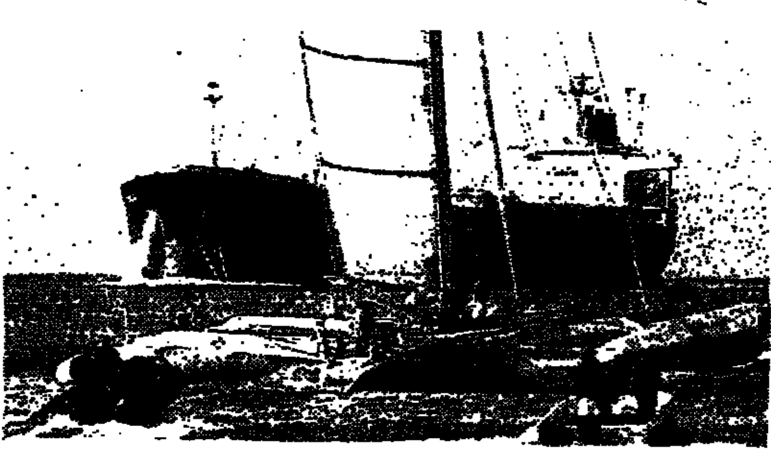
Savicevic to Leave AC Milan

ROME: Dejan Savicevic will definitely leave AC Milan at the end of the season and join either Manchester United or Monaco, sports daily *Corriere Dello Sport* revealed on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old Montenegrin said: "My time here is over. I know already that I will be sold by AC Milan to the highest bidder. It will very probably be Manchester United but it seems Monaco have also made a good offer."

His contract with the five-time European Cup champions however does not run out till June 1998.

Corriere Dello Sport added the departure of Savicevic has been planned for some time, even before the arrival of new coach Arrigo Saachi about a month ago. And the paper added AC Milan will ask for 10 billion lire (6.5 million dollars).



BREST, France (Dec. 31): The trimaran "Sport Elec" passes a super tanker entering Brest, as Olivier de Kersauson and his crew of six leave to try to win Jules Verne Trophy (around the world in under 80 days), currently held by New Zealander Peter Blake with the catamaran "Enza" in 74 days, 22 hours and 17 minutes.

7 Countries Ready to Take Part in Int'l Wrestling Contests

TEHRAN — Pakistan, Estonia, and Palestine announced readiness yesterday to take part in the Takhti Cup International Wrestling Contests due to begin on February 11, bringing the number of participant countries to seven.

According to Iran's Wrestling Federation, France, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Syria have already expressed their readiness to send teams to the sporting event to be held during the Ten-Day Dawn period (February 1-11) marking the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The four-day international wrestling competitions are scheduled to be held in the northern city of Sari.

In related news, Syria has said it will dispatch a team to take part in the Ten-Day Dawn gymnastic championships due on February 12-14 in Tehran.

Iraq, India, Hungary, Greece, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Kazakhstan have also been invited to participate in the international competitions. *(IRNA)*

Africans Favored in Traditional New Year's Eve Race

SAO PAULO, Brazil — African runners are favored to win the 72nd St. Silvester Road Race, the traditional New Year's Eve competition on the streets of South America's biggest city.

At least 12,000 athletes — about 9,000 men and 3,000 women — from some 20 countries will run Tuesday in the 15-kilometer (9.3-mile) race along wide, skyscraper-lined avenues and through narrow, twisting streets of downtown Sao Paulo.

Competing for a top prize of $10,000, runners will take the place of the cars, trucks and buses that normally clog and pollute this city of 10 million.

This year's field includes some 300 foreign athletes, from the United States, Australia, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Colombia, Italy, South Africa, Algeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Burundi and the Netherlands.

Women athletes start the St. Silvester Race at 3:15 p.m. (1715 GMT), while the men begin at 5:00 p.m. (1900 GMT).

Despite the large field, Marcelo Eduardo Braga, one of the organizers of the event, said no more than 10 men and five women have any real chance of standing on the podium among the top five finishers.

Braga and most sports commentators pick Kenyan athletes to win the men's division. Among the favorites are defending champion Paul Tergat Simon Chemwoyo, the winner in 1992 and 1993, Joseph Kimani and Peter Ndirangu.

Tergat, 27, said he had been training for the St. Silvester since November and that his chief concern was the heat of the southern hemisphere summer.

"I am in excellent physical shape, but my performance will depend on the weather," Tergat said at a news conference. "The less heat and humidity there is, the better I will run." *(AP)*



LAHORE, Pakistan (Dec. 31): Former Pakistan cricket star-turned politician Imran Khan shakes hands with his party supporters during a visit to his constituency while campaigning for the National Assembly seat. Khan who is the chief of his own party "Tehrik-i-Insaaf (movement for justice) kicked off his own election campaign for the general elections in Pakistan, which are scheduled for February 3, 1997.

(AFP PHOTO)

Understanding Kung Fu as Described by a Master

By Ja'far Qasempour Jahangir

Skills of Kung Fu

What Is Kung Fu?

(Part 20)

Five Principles of Kung Fu

Kung fu is the main martial art in Far East where various techniques of martial arts are practiced and kung fu has had an undeniable influence on all martial arts of the East because the greatest trainees of kung fu from East and West - be it secretly or openly - have practiced since 4,000 years ago. In ancient times, kung fu appeared and was completed little by little and gradually it turned into a perfect sport and then kung fu was scientifically introduced and its technical principles and philosophy of psychology were compiled and completed so that it turned into one of the most advanced martial arts. Kung fu brings about health, cultivation of the mind. Kung fu techniques do not emphasize on power but as a general principle advise on keeping it up to the last minute.



The kung fu player should become aware of his rival's power and does not react against it. He should always turn the rival's technique into his technique and also get maximum benefit from the rival's tactics to perform his own tactics — it is called in kung fu *view vee* (per se). Meditation, Chee (breathing), and energy needs no practice since they are acquired per se.

On the whole, the martial arts can be divided into five parts:

1) Rotative strokes of hand including all techniques of hand, fist, palm, knee, elbow, shoulder and forearm as well as head and thigh. Of course, some techniques such as claws of eagle and beak of crane are trained in some schools

2) Strokes of leg involving all techniques of leg trained both in the South and North

3) Consecutive techniques including 71 different angled and locking techniques

4) Throw-downs including 36 techniques

5) Martial weapons including 18 different types.



KARACHI, Pakistan (January. 1): Pakistani police arrests an injured leader of a religious youth wing of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) after the baton charge on the New Year night, here. (AFP PHOTO)

Iranian Ambassador Meets Armenian Archbishop

TEHRAN — Iran's Ambassador to Romania Mohammad Reza Morshedzadeh, met with patriarchate Teoctist Arapasu, leader of the Romanian Orthodox church in Bucharest, on Wednesday where he emphasized the need for solidarity among divine religions and continuation of dialog between Islam and Christianity.

The diplomat congratulated the Romanian archbishop on the New Christian Year, saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a system based on religion administering Divine rules.

He referred to issues of mutual interest such as the increasingly developing relations between Iran and Romania, holding of the 11th Joint Economic Commission in Terhan and export of oil from Iran to Romania.

The archbishop for his part termed Iran as a country with religiously committed people, adding that there have always been good relations between the two nations of Iran and Romania.

(IRNA)

Pakistani Shia Muslim Leader Shot Dead

ISLAMABAD — Unidentified gunmen have shot dead a Shia leader in the Pakistani Province of Punjab, the sixth killing there in 24 hours, police said Wednesday.

Ayub Ali Siddiqui, president of the Multan chapter of the main Shia political party, the Tehreek-i-Jafria Pakistan (TJP), was killed by two assailants on a motorbike, they said.

Siddiqui, a banker, was returning home from his office late Tuesday in a scooter rickshaw when the assailants armed with automatic weapons opened fire as the vehicle slowed at an intersection.

The Shia leader who was critically wounded was rushed to hospital where he died later. A passer-by was also shot but he was reported out of danger.

Siddiqui's murder came hours after a central TJP leader Zulfiqar Ali Naqavi and four others were gunned down in the Punjab capital Lahore by unknown attackers who sprayed his car with bullets.

In the daylight ambush Naqavi, a candidate in the February 3 polls for a Punjab Assembly seat, was assasinated along with his 20-year old son, a bodyguard, his driver and a friend in Kot Lakhpat, an industrial district in the suburbs of Lahore.

Several religious leaders including TJP chief Sajid Naqavi condemned the murders, describing them as a planned "conspiracy" to foment unrest.

President Farooq Ahmed Leghari and Prime Minister Malik Meraj Khalid expressing grief and anguish over the killings, said the government would deal sternly with elements who wanted to achieve their "nefarious" design by employing negative tactics.

They also directed the provincial government to step up security to protect the lives and property of citizens.

(AFP)

Iran Ranks 1st at Int'l Qoran Recitation Competition

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Hassan Rabeeyan, the Iranian Qoran reciter, won the First International Qoran Recitation Contests held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

(Contd from Pg. 12)

KABUL'S ....

shroud-like veil that covers its wearer from head to toe, with only a small patch of gauze to see out of, is a tenet of the Islamic sect to which most Afghans adhere.

"The viewpoint and decrees of our religion — Hanafi Sunni Islam — are rather strict and do not allow women to have the face unveiled," he said.

"For example, if the market is full of men, and women are walking around with their faces uncovered, this kind of situation will create corruption," The head of the Supreme Court explained it differently.

"Sharia (Islamic law) allows women to have their faces unveiled as long as there is no sign of agitation or lust.

However, we are now in an emergency situation, so it is right that women should have their faces veiled," Chief Justice Al-Haj Maulawi Abdul Gaffur Sanani said in a recent interview.

Observers in Kabul said one of the reasons for the edicts was the Taleban were keen to retain the purity of their movement despite the attractions of the relatively cosmopolitan capital.

"Many of the Taleban fighters are from the villages of south Afghanistan where these codes of behavior are a way of life.

The Taleban believe that living in Kabul softened and corrupted the last regime so much that they were eventually forced to give up the city. They don't want their own men going the same way," said one observer who requested anonymity.

Taleban not against women working under right circumstances Maulawi Baligh insisted the Taleban were not against women working or being educated, but the circumstances are not right.

"In principle we are not against women working or women's education, but that requires security and the setting up of segregated offices, schools and transportation," he said. (Reuter)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

72....

Turkish soldiers.

The operation was launched Monday in pursuit of 100 to 120 members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is seeking to create a separate state for the Kurdish people scattered mainly in eastern Turkey, Iraq and Iran.

Turkish F-4 aircraft based here bombed Sinath, while Turkish troops crossed the border into Iraq in pursuit of fleeing PKK fighters, said Necati Bilican, the official here in charge of coordinating operations against the PKK.

Turkish troops had advanced five kilometers (three miles) into northern Iraq territory by late Wednesday and were patrolling the area, Bilican said.

(Contd from Pg. 1)

KABUL ...

lets, canon shells and flares which illuminated the clear night sky.

However, how many bombs were dropped and on what location — if any at all — could not be immediately confirmed. The ferocity of the ground fire made it almost impossible to distinguish what booms were incoming bombs or outgoing fire from the city streets.

The recent spate of jet attacks, most likely by forces of northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam — a key figure in the anti-Taleban alliance — are becoming an almost daily fixture for the capital.

Air raids on the beleaguered capital have intensified in recent days, seemingly an angry responce to Taleban gains north of Kabul made last week.

Taleban military sources told AFP Wednesday that their forces had made some further advances into villages south of the key Bagram Airbase — controlled by forces hostile to the Taleban — but this could not be independently confirmed.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

PALESTINIANS..

Palestinian people and is aimed at sabotaging the peace accords," said Nabil abu Roudeina, an Arafat spokesman.

"We call on the Israeli government to immediately put an end to such acts and help protect the peace process," he added.

Arafat also spoke by telephone with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to inform him of the incident, his spokesman said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned rightwing elements in his coalition that he would form a government with the opposition Labor Party if they did not support him on the issue of Al-Khalil, the *Haaretz* newspaper said Wednesday.

Netanyahu gathered overnight Tuesday several of his coalition partners and warned them he would be "forced to think of forging a national unity government with the party of Shimon Peres, if the governing majority continues to be so irresponsible," the paper said.

"I can't get anything passed with such a majority," the daily quoted Netanyahu as saying.

Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, a firm believer that Israel should include all the biblical Hebrews' lands, and five other ministers of the ruling coalition refused to support Netanyahu Monday when the far-right opposition Moledet Party submitted a no-confidence motion.

Another 15 ruling coalition deputies, who also oppose the accord on a handover of the West Bank city of Al-Khalil to Palestinian rule, joined them in abstaining, but the motion failed.

Only two Moledet members of Parliament actually voted for the measure, indicating that those who contest the accord really do not wish to oust the government, a step which would require 61 votes from the 120-seat Knesset.

According to *Haaretz*, Netanyahu called Peres, the former prime minister Tuesday night to brief him on talks on Israel's troop redeployment in Al-Khalil.

Israel last had a government of national unity between 1988 and 1992 when neither Labor nor Likud had enough votes to form a governing coalition in Parliament.

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) pledged revenge on Wednesday for a renegade Israeli soldier's attack in Al-Khalil and criticized the Palestinian Authority for neglecting the security of the West Bank town's Arab residents.

"Hamas pledges to its people and the entire world that the Zionists' crime will not go unpunished for very long and that overall resistance to the occupation will continue until our people have regained all their rights," the Palestinian Hamas group said.

Israeli soldier Noam Friedman opened fire on Palestinians in an open-air market in Al-Khalil on Wednesday, wounding at least six in a New Year's day attack aimed at undermining an apparently imminent accord on Israeli military redeployment from the town.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

SERBIAN ...

Belgrade is expected to give its response by Friday to the team from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has urged it to accept the gains by the opposition together coalition.

Together candidates won 13 of Serbia's biggest towns and nine districts in Belgrade, but the results were cancelled by authorities, triggering the huge daily street protests.

The shift in tactics Wednesday not only gets around the government ban on the rallies, but also focuses attention on the state-run media's overt pro-government coverage of the opposition movement.

"We don't want to listen to their lies any more, so from 7:30 p.m.to 8:00 p.m. (1830 to 1900 GMT) — we will make noise," a together statement said, quoted by the Independent news agency beta.

Serbian television is considered one of Milosevic's most powerful arms. Opposition parties are virtually shut out from programming, and state-run shows are the only ones that can be seen all over the country.

Belgrade students, who have been holding their own protest marches, also planned to join in the "noisy" action on the first day of 1997.

The Serbian opposition started the New Year vowing to "accomplish in 1997 what we started in 1996," in the words of one of its leaders, Zoran Djindjic.

He was speaking at a carnaval-like rally in Belgrade on New Year's Eve, when at least 200,000 people jammed the city streets despite the freezing weather.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

NEW ....

U.S. firms and persons be sued in U.S. courts by U.S. nationals or companies for profiting from their former property which Cuba nationalized after the 1959 revolution, and now is privatizing.

That prospect has angered U.S. allies including Canada, European and Latin American countries which do business in Cuba.

Clinton must decide by January 16 whether to waive Title III again, or to let the U.S. law's most controversial clause take effect.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

PRESIDENT ....

Mehran was completely levelled to the ground by the Iraqi forces during the war time. Some 3,500 residential and commercial units were constructed or reconstructed in this war-torn city since the end of war in 1988

(Contd from Pg. 1)

SUDANESE .....

Turabi told a parliamentary committee that the aggression was planned by Israel and the United States, in Eritrea, one of Sudan's eastern neighbors, along with disbanded Sudanese political parties.

"Eritrea and the opposition have of late taken to practices of looting and sabotage by planting landmines and destroying vehicles," he added.

Eritrea hosts an alliance of Sudanese opposition parties fighting in southern Sudan against the Islamic military government in Khartoum.

(Contd from Pg. 1)

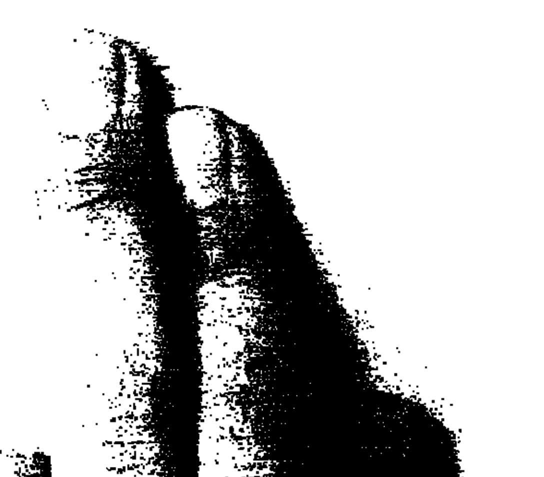
LIBYA ....

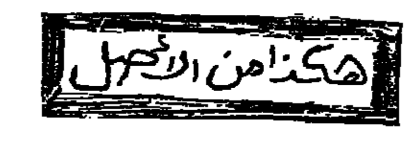
It said Kumar was told that Libya was "surprised by such a visit to a friendly country like India."

JANA added that India has been "considered to be a pole of the Non-Aligned Movement and to have always had a positive stance towards the Palestinian cause in particular and issues of the Third World in general."

Weizman arrived in India on Sunday on the first visit there by an Israeli head of state.

(AFP)

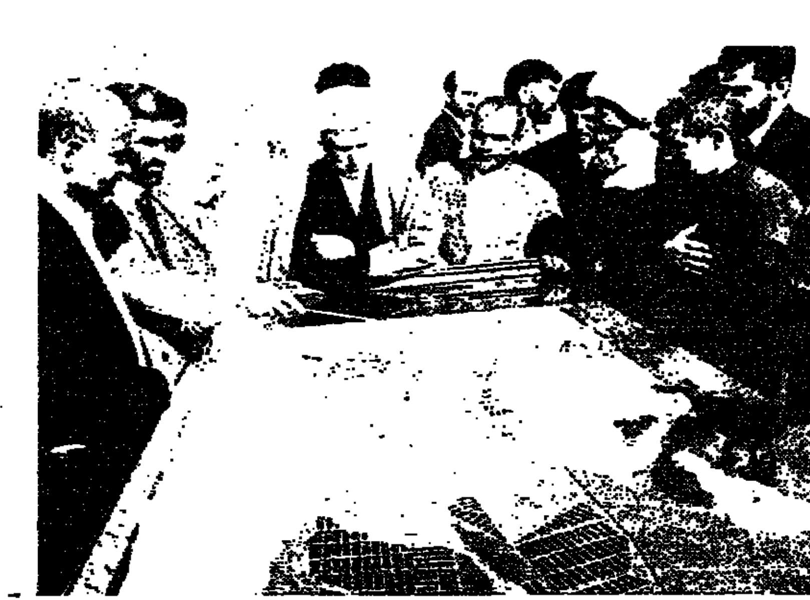




President Rafsanjani's Visit to Ilam in Photos





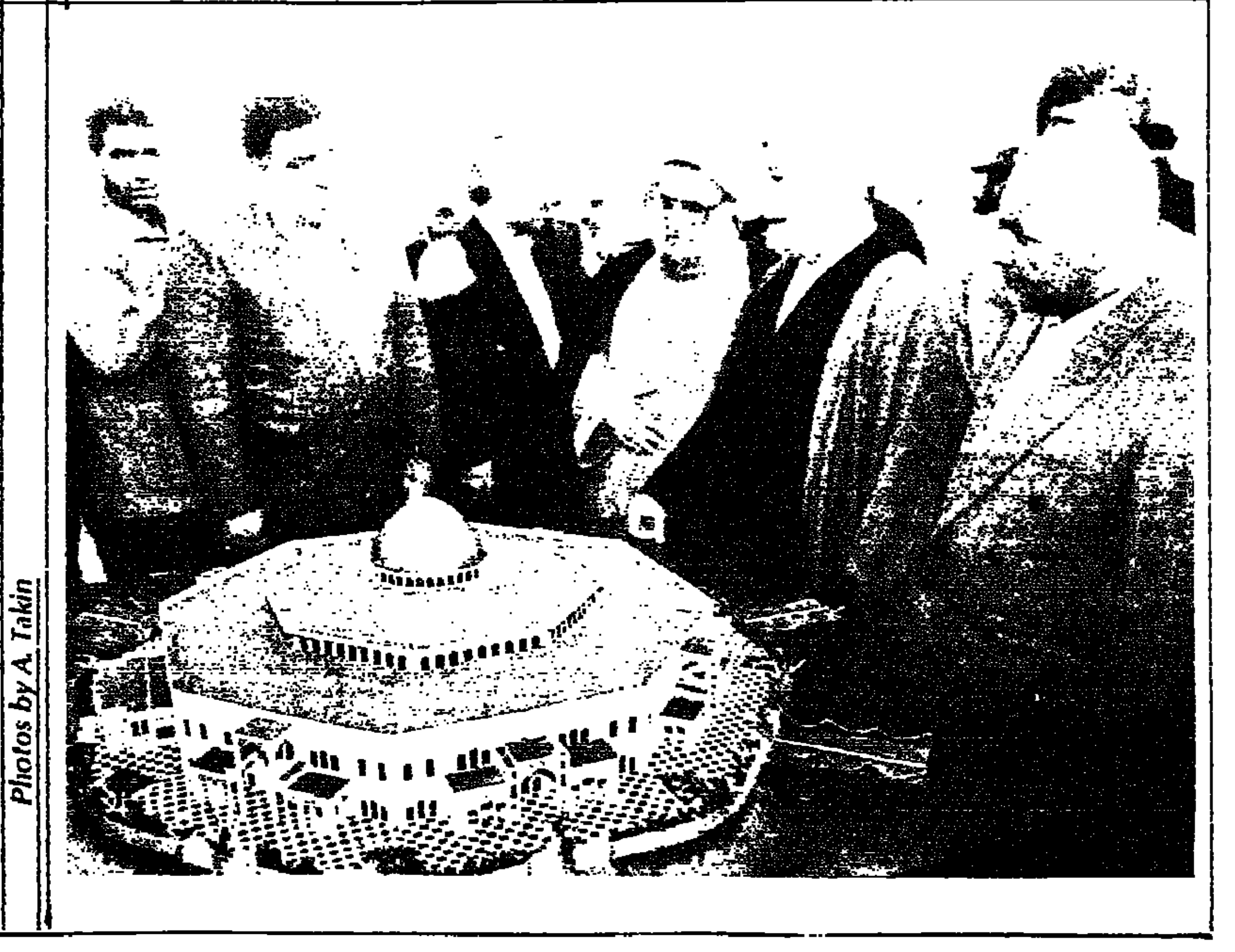












Photos by A. Takin

Mega-Truffle Wins Over Hong Kong Diners

HONG KONG — A monster truffle was sacrificed at a special New Year's eve dinner in Hong Kong for 120 gourmets.

The 620-gram (20-ounce) Italian fungus was bought for 40,000 Hong Kong dollars ($5,175) by a local hotel, outbidding chefs in Milan, New York, Paris and Tokyo, the South China Morning Post reported Wednesday.

"It is wonderful to find something like this. It is like a dinosaur egg from Jurassic park," said Mario Caramella, chef at the Grand Stanford Harbour View Hotel.

(AFP)

35 Injured in Balcony Collapse

AUSTRALIA — Thirty-five New Year revellers were injured after falling five meters (17 feet) when a wooden balcony collapsed near here, police said Wednesday.

Police said 40 people were on the balcony of a North Fremantle apartment when it collapsed, throwing them onto a concrete surface.

Thirteen were seriously hurt with broken legs and suspected spinal injuries.

(AFP)

New Bodies Found, Bringing Total to 15 in Greek Freighter Sinking

ATHENS — Frogmen found two more bodies from a Greek freighter which sank in heavy seas, bringing the number of corpses recovered to 15, the Merchant Marine Ministry said on Wednesday.

The cargo ship Distos was carrying 21 people when it went down Saturday while taking a load of cement from the eastern town of Volos to the port of Athens, Piraeus.

The bodies of 10 crewmen and two women, the wives of officers, have already been found, and the the body of a 12-year-old girl, the daughter of one of the ship's officers, was found overnight between Tuesday and Wednesday.

Rescue workers are still looking for the corspes of five sailors.

The only survivor of the tragedy, a 22-year-old cadet, was washed overboard and rescued by a fishing boat.

The ship capsized in high winds off the eastern Evvoia peninsula with 21 people on board including 18 crew late Saturday, but rescue operations were only launched the following morning.

Greek authorities believe that the high winds probably caused the vessel's cargo of 5,300 tons of cement to shift, causing it to founder.

(AFP)

Britain Faces Coldest New Year for Nearly 20 Years



LONDON, United Kingdom (Dec. 31): Henry Gano carves a large Happy New Year sculpture made of ice outside the Dorchester Hotel, London, where he works as a Kitchen Artist. The sculpture has been carved out over two days from sixty blocks of ice made out of 7,500 liters of water. Temperatures in Britain have been hovering around zero for days as freezing winds blow in from Europe.

(AFP PHOTO)

LONDON — Thousands of revellers descended on Trafalgar Square late Tuesday to welcome in the New Year, braving the coldest New Year eve's temperatures in central London for nearly 20 years.

The overnight temperature was forecast at minus three degrees Celsius with the wind chill factor lowering it to at least minus 10.

But that did not deter the thousands of merrymakers who blasted on whistles and stamped their feet to keep warm as crowds built up in the last hours of 1996.

As light snow fell, revellers were searched by police at barricades on the approaches to the square.

It was thought that up to 100,000 people would gather despite Scotland Yard's now traditional appeal for people to stay away.

The Yard stressed there would be no entertainment on offer, no access to the fountains and constant danger of crushing.

In 1982, two women were crushed to death in the square, and in 1992, police admitted they came near to losing control of a 120,000 strong crowd as crash barriers buckled and the Irish Republican Army gave a hoax bomb warning.

(AFP)

Sri Lanka Troops Kill 20 Rebels in Fresh Offensives

COLOMBO — Security forces smashed a jungle base of Tamil Tiger guerrillas in eastern Sri Lanka Wednesday, killing at least 20 rebels as troops kept up two offensives, officials said.

Heavily armed government soldiers backed by the air force destroyed the jungle base of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) just east of the village of Rukam in the district of Batticaloa, officials said.

"There were 10 Tigers at the base and all of them were killed and their weapons were recovered," a local official said. "They were taken by surprise because they probably expected us to move in a different direction."

Another nine rebels were killed just before troops stormed the base, officials said, adding that there were no casualties among the troops.

A simultaneous military offensive was underway in the Vadamarachchi sector of the northern peninsula of Jaffna where a top Tiger leader identified as Major Rajee was killed, officials said.

The LTTE's clandestine Voice of Tigers radio confirmed the death of Rajee in a confrontation with the security forces in Vadamarachchi, and said he was one of their leaders from the eastern district of Batticaloa.

In a statement from its London office Tuesday, the LTTE said that air force bombers heavily populated Tamil villages in the Batticaloa district and at least one civilian was killed.

(AFP)

Rebels Blast Railway Bridge in India's Assam State

GUWAHATI, India — Indian tribal militants, blamed for a train bombing that killed 38 people Monday, destroyed a railway bridge in another attack Wednesday, police said.

A police spokesman said Bodo rebels blew up the bridge in the Darrang district of the far-eastern state of Assam at 1:50 a.m. (2020 GMT) Wednesday using a remote-control bomb.

A goods train crossed the bridge near Goreshawar, around 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of Guwahati, shortly before the incident, but there were no casualties.

The attack was the third in the state this week.

The official death toll following Monday's bombing, which derailed a crowded train and destroyed three carriages near Fakiragram in the remote district of Kokrajhar, remained at 38 Wednesday. The bodies were transported to Guwahati Tuesday night for identification.

Six of the 63 injured in the attack, meanwhile, remained in critical condition, according to hospital sources.

The day before, a road bridge in the state was blown up.

Bodo separatists, campaigning since 1987 for a tribal homeland in Assam and adjoining states, have not claimed responsibility for any of the bombings but have been blamed by police and state politicians.

(AFP)

Rebels Stick to Their Hard-Line, Demand Release of Jailed Comrades

PERU - Meeting with journalists for the first time since the hostage standoff began, Peruvian rebels holed up in the Japanese ambassador's residence reiterated demands that their imprisoned comrades be freed.

The tough position, announced Tuesday not long before two hostages were freed, seemed to override earlier hints that the Tupac Amaru rebels might moderate their demands. Late Monday, president Alberto Fujimori refused to consider jail releases, but said that if the rebels freed their hostages they might be allowed safe passage to another country.

The rebels revived their demand for the release of about 300 fellow rebels during a nearly two-hour meeting with about 20 journalists - including an Associated Press photographer - who entered the residence for the first time since the crisis began two weeks ago.

On Tuesday afternoon, the rebels released Honduran ambassador Eduardo Martel and Argentine consul Juan Antonio Ibanez, leaving 81 hostages in the besieged compound.

The freed hostages looked relaxed as they walked out of the walled compound. They were taken to a military hospital for checkups.

Ibanez said the last thing he did was to say goodby to the rebel commandeer "gentleman to gentleman" and that they wished each other a happy New Year.

There was no immediate explanation for the release.

With Tuesday's release, two ambassadors - from Bolivia and Japan - remain among the officials and business leaders held hostage since the rebels stormed the residence Dec. 17, initially seizing more than 500 people.

In the meeting with journalists, a masked spokesman, who identified himself as rebel leader Nestor Cerpa, denounced Fujimori's government, but said the rebels are open to mediation by anybody, including Cuban President Fidel Castro or Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

He also dismissed Fujimori's hint that the rebels might be allowed to leave the country.

"If I had wanted to leave I would have left clandestinely, as surely many dedicated people have done," he said.

The new rebel statements seemed to reduce any prospect of a quick end to the crisis, which began when the guerrillas seized the residence of the Japanese ambassador during a cocktail party.

Four haggard-looking hostages, including Japanese ambassador Morihisa Aoki, also met with the journalists, who entered the residence despite police opposition.

Peruvian Foreign Minister Francisco Tudela said he and other hostages were being treated well given the circumstances and were taking no role in trying to resolve the crisis.

(AP)

Polish Hostages in Yemen Freed

SANAA — Five Polish tourists taken by armed tribesmen in Yemen were freed on Wednesday, a mediator in the negotiations said, but the Polish Embassy was unable to confirm their release.

"The five hostages are being driven to Sanaa under armed escort," a senior tribal official who was mediating the Polish tourists' release told AFP.

The Polish Ambassador to Yemen, Krzysztof Suprowicz, said he could not yet confirm that the hostages had been freed.

They were kidnapped on December 26 by the Beni Jabr tribe, which is seeking financial compensation from the government.

(AFP)

Clinton Invites Netanyahu to White House

BAIT-UL-MOQADDAS — U.S. President Bill Clinton invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House at the beginning of 1997 for "strategic" talks, the prime minister's spokesman said Tuesday.

U.S. mediator Dennis Ross delivered the invitation, in a message from Clinton in which the U.S. president said he wants "to be briefed on the strategic situation" in the Middle East, Bazak said.

Clinton also congratulated Netanyahu "for his firm commitment to the road to peace," Bazak said.

(AFP)

Rescuers Free 150 From Snow-Bound Russian Tunnel

MOSCOW — Rescue teams on Wednesday freed about half of some 300 people trapped by avalanches for six days in a tunnel in the Caucasus mountains in southern Russia, Russian television reported.

A total of 148 people, 22 of them children, were taken by helicopter to Vladikavkz, the capital of North Ossetia, the NTV station said, quoting rescue services.

The rest of the people still in the tunnel were given food and warm clothing, it added.

ITAR-TASS said the ones that stayed behind did so because they did not want to abandon their cars, buses or trucks.

Rescuers are in permanent radio contact with them, the news agency said.

Some 100 rescuers struggled Wednesday to clear snow from the trans-Caucasus highway leading to the four-kilometer (2. 5 mile) tunnel but were hindered by more avalanches and rock falls.

(AFP)



KOKRAJHAR, India (Dec. 31): Bodies lie partially covered bef the Brahmaputra Mail passenger train (top) at Kokrajhar in northeastern Indian state of Assam, following two blasts the p vious night by suspected Bodo tribal militants which devasta three compartments killing at least 38 people. The Assam gove ment invited Bodo militants for peace talks after the attack on train. Initial reports had placed the death toll at over 100.

(AFP PH

Italian Tax Police Now Showing Muscle

ROME — For years considered a wimp, Italy's Internal Revenue Service is flexing more muscle.

The new show of power has so far kept someone from winning a teddy bear, puzzled a few nuns and created lots of ill will.

The more aggressive approach by the Guardia Di Finanza, or tax police, is aimed at rooting out chronic tax evasion, a phenomenon so widespread it is blamed in part for Italy's persistent budget deficit. unreported income is estimated to reach 230 trillion lire ($ 150 billion).

The latest weapon is a toll-free, 24-hour hotline that citizens can call to report suspected tax cheats.

But it has outraged some parliament members.

Most of the criticism came from conservative parties whose base is built largely around business people who already think taxes are too high. But some liberals also worried about possible violations of civil rights - especially through the use of anonymous tips.

Also coming out against the hotline was the theologian of the Vatican's newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. "There's the risk that among citizens, a mechanism can be set off that can feed rivalries, hate, tensions, diffidence, mistrust," said Rev. Gino Concetti.

There have been no major arrests stemming from a hotline call, but several dozen investigations have been opened, police said.

(AP)

U.S. Stocks Set to Post Sixth Straight Annual Gain Ahead of slowdown

NEW YORK — Buoyed by strong economic fundamentals, the U.S. stock market was poised Tuesday to post its sixth straight annual gain ahead of what analysts have predicted will be more modest activity early next year.

While the Dow Jones industrial average of blue chip issues opened lower Tuesday, most analysts were looking for the Dow to finish the year in positive territory.

The index through Monday was up 28 percent after finishing 33.5 percent higher in 1995. If expert predictions are confirmed, 1996 will record the sixth straight annual gain — the first such streak in the Dow's 100-year history.

The "bullish" trend on Wall Street is forecast to continue into 1997 but at a more sedate pace.

"The U.S. stock market May be vulnerable to profit-taking in the near term," according to an analysis by Wright Investors' Service in Connecticut.

"At best, stock market performance is likely to be rather mundane during the first half of the new year." At American Express financial advisors there are likewise fears that the economic fundamentals that have supported the market in 1996 could turn against equities.

"If my forecast is correct, financial markets are very likely to be disappointed sometime in 1997," warned economist dan laufenberg.

"For starters, inflation is likely to be at higher again in 1997, and this time it will be more widespread than just higher food and energy prices.

"Even a mild uptick, I believe, could induce the Federal Reserve to nudge short-term interest rates up in late spring or early summer, probably one-quarter or one-half a percentage point." Inflation, which strikes terror in the hearts of stock and bond dealers, was limited to 3.3 percent through November. with the core rate — excluding food and energy — held to 2.6 percent.

As a result, the U.S. Federal Reserve under chairman Alan Greenspan left short-term interest rates alone in 1996 — to the great relief of the financial markets.

Also shoring up stocks have been better than expected corporate earnings, which increased by more than 10 percent in 1996 for their fourth straight double digit gain, according to wright.

At the same time, job creation averaged more than 200,000 a month — without igniting wage-driven inflation — and many U.S. workers took advantage of technology gains to boost their productivity.

For Abby Joseph Cohen, a managing director at Goldman, Sachs and Company and a prominent stock watcher, the market next year will continue to take advantage of an overall economic expansion.

"Most bull markets end when stocks are overpriced, not fairly priced as they are now," she wrote recently in the *Washington post*.

Prices will continue to increase in 1997, albeit at a 'less exuberant pace' in tandem with a slower-growing us economy, she said.

"I expect the dow jones industrial average to reach 7,050 before 1997 ends, a gain of about 10 percent, or roughly half the 1996 increase. " Prospects for sustained growth in early 1997 were strengthened Tuesday with a report from the conference board that consumer confidence shot up four points in December, defying wall street predictions for a downturn.

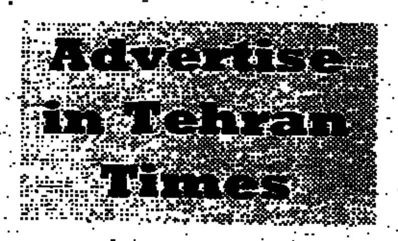
"Consumer confidence is up dramatically over the last 12 months, suggesting that consumer demand will help pave the way for a healthy economy during the first half of 1997," said Lynn Franco, associate director at the Conference Board Consumer Research Center.

The board said in a statement that "consumers are more positive now than they were in November, with nearly 29 percent saying that jobs are plentiful, up from less than 27 percent in November. " Investors too displayed a remarkable degree of confidence in 1996, pouring a record $225 billion into stock mutual funds.

In another indication of healthy growth, sales of new homes were reported Tuesday to have surged 14.2 percent in November over October and to have risen 13.7 percent year-on-year.

On Monday the National Association of Realtors said sales of existing residences were up 1. 8 percent in November.

(AFP)



DINSLAKEN, Germany (December 29): Miners warm themselves by a coal fire during a protest picket at the 'Lohberg' mine in Dinslaken. Coal miners in various German mines - threatned by rumors of reductions or oss of up to 500,000 jobs in coal mining and its peripherical industries - plan to stage pickets until February 1997, when the German government is due to discuss and decide on further subsidies for the German coal mining industry.

(AFP PHOTO)

Sluggish Indian Economy Likely to Revive in Mid-97: Analysts

BOMBAY — India's economy, which has slowed under the burden of high interest rates, political uncertainty and limp consumer demand, is likely to revive in the middle of 1997, analysts and economists said here Wednesday.

Analyst Sanjeev Mohta at brokerage james capel argued rising rural incomes would help turn around the economy in July or August.

"Agricultural production is up, as industrial production is slipping. We forecast a 4. 5 percent growth in agriculture, and terms of trade have moved in favour of primary producers in the past few months," he said.

Mohta said food-grain prices were up 15 percent year on year in November, while manufactured product prices were up only four percent.

Anindya Chatterjee, an economist at Brokerage Natwest Markets, said rising demand for consumer products would spur the economic revival in 1997.

"Demand will pick up slowly from the first half of 1997, accelerating from the second half of the year," he said.

Chatterjee said falling interest rates, high farm output and rising demand for consumer products would push up the economy.

But Devesh Kumar at Brokerage Daewoo Securities said interest rates remained too high, starving industry of cash.

"Interest rates are still high and need to come down further.

Banks find it safer to park money in government bonds rather than lend to industry," he said.

Interest rates of between 17 and 30 percent in 1996 put money out of the reach of companies, many putting off new projects and expansion plans.

India's Central Bank this year cut the cash reserve ratio of Commercial Banks by two percentage points in a bid to inject more money into the system, and banks followed by cutting prime lending rates by one percentage point.

But Kumar said industry had complained it was not enough.

He expected a major economic revival to begin in October 1997 on the back of good harvests and rising rural incomes.

Basudeb Sen, a general manager at the unit trust of India, the country's largest mutual fund, said he feared the economy would continue to 'plod along generally at the current pace.

"Industry does not seem poised for a good performance, as infrastructural bottlenecks are coming in the way," he said.

"During the last one or two years there has been no significant investments in infrastructure and most of the money has to come from cuts in government spending and subsidies." India's infrastructure needs hundreds of millions of dollars of fresh investment to support industrial and export growth, he said.

Sen said prospects for 1997 would not pick up unless February's budget contained new incentives for home savings, reduced government spending and increased investment in infrastructure.

India began radical pro-market reforms in 1991 in the wake of a severe overseas payments crisis, but reforms have slowed down over the past couple of years due to political problems.

(AFP)

Saudi Arabia's 1997 Budget Forecasts $4.5 bn deficit

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (ap) - The Saudi Arabian economy grew an estimated percent in 1996, a sharp increase from the 1995 annual growth rate of 4. percent, the Saudi Press Agency reports.

The announcement came after the 1997 government budget was completed Mon during a session chaired by King Fahd in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

The budget for the fiscal year beginning Wednesday forecasts a 1997 budget deficit of 17 billion riyals ($4. 5 billion), the Ministry of Finance and national economy said in a statement.

The budget plan for the fiscal year beginning Wednesday projects overall 1997 revenues at 164 billion riyals ($43. 7 billion), down from revenues of 177 billion riyals ($47. 2 billion) earned in 1996.

The budget forecasts expenditures at 181 billion riyals ($48. 2 billion), also down from the 1996 figure of 194 billion riyals ($51. 7 billion).

Actual 1996 revenues and expenses were higher than earlier forecasts for the year of 131 billion riyals ($34. 9 billion) and 150 billion riyals ($40 billion) respectively.

This reflected higher-than-expected international oil prices throughout 1996. The saudi budget planners generally assume conservative oil price for their budget calculations.

The 1997 budget deficit remained at the same level as in 1996.

Saudi arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, usually bridges its deficit through borrowing from the domestic market.

The spending plan did not disclose the country's defense expenditures, believed to be a major item in the saudi budget.

The ministry estimated the 1996 gross domestic product at about 510 billion riyals ($136 billion), up from 469 billion riyals ($125 billion) in 1995.

It said the private sector's contribution to the overall GDP rose to 35 percent in 1996, 3. 5 percent higher than in 1995.

The government said the 1996 inflation rate was below 1 percent, reflecting the stability of domestic prices.

The finance ministry said the balance of payment showed improvement in 1996. It said the current account recorded a surplus of 700 million riyals ($186 million) in 1996, compared with a 19. 9 billion riyals ($5. 3 billion) last year.0

This was mainly a result of higher value of oil exports due to higher oil prices in 1996.

Saudi Arabia's main export item is crude oil. Its current opec-assigned output quota is 8 million barrels a day.

Despite lower petrochemical prices in 1996, as well as lower agricultural exports, the ministry said 1996's overall non-oil exports rose about 2. 7 percent.

Total 1996 imports declined 1. 5 percent to 94. 6 billion riyals ($25. 2 billion) from the previous year.

(AP)

Third World Pioneers See Internet as Road to First World

LIMA, Peru -- Using tropical fish for bait, Edgar Panduro casts his line into the Internet, hoping to reel in First World profits for his Third World business.

"I look for fish on the Internet," he says, punching the words "tropical fish" on a World Wide Web search engine, hitting the enter key and watching a list of entries roll down the screen.

He is one of a growing number of businessmen and other professionals in poor countries using the Internet as an electronic short-cut to profits, expertise and other resources in wealthy countries.

"I make contact, introduce myself and leave my address. Later I send or fax them more information," he adds.

Panduro's family-owned company sells tropical fish and other products from the Amazon jungle. His web connections already have netted him a $5,000 contract with a German buyer for wild pigskin to make gloves.

He is one of a growing number of businessmen and other professionals in poor countries using the Internet as an electronic short-cut to profits, expertise and other resources in wealthy countries.

A few examples:

- Brazilian rubber tappers set up a Web page to post prices for rain forest products like Brazil nuts, and also to promote rain forest conservation and disseminate information about environmental martyr Chico Mendes.
- Doctors in 23 African nations use the Internet to get help in diagnosing and treating patients, going directly to colleagues at some of the best medical centers in the world for advice.
- Computer programmers in India work for large U.S. corporations, writing programs and sending their work via the Internet to their home offices.
- A Venezuelan non-profit cooperative that provides small loans to low-income families for home repairs and buying used cars has a Web page in hopes of attracting donations and expanding its services.

Whether trying to make a living, heal the sick or preserve nature, all see the Internet as a way to bridge geographical, social and economic distances.

Officials in the West African nation of Benin credit cyberspace for former dictator Mathieu Kerekou's upset victory in the March presidential election over incumbent Nicephore Soglo. Kerekou used the Internet to lobby political and business leaders around the world for support, which gave him more money for his campaign.

His government is now committed to the Internet.

"In its relations with the external world, Benin is no longer limited. We have 45 million subscribers to whom we can address our problems," Albert Tevoedjre, Benin's Public Works Minister, said, referring to the estimated number of Internet users worldwide.

He said the government has several projects in the works involving the Internet, including one looking for ways to attract jobs to the former French colony.

Elsewhere in Africa, the Internet is being used to save lives.

Dr. Fred Bukachi, who runs the Kenyan part of Healthnet from Kenyatta Hospital in Nairobi, said at least two patients lived because of treatment recommendations made over the Internet.

In one case a doctor got urgently needed help for a patient with kidney failure from a doctor at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. In the other, a doctor in Britain with experience in Africa advised how to treat a patient severely ill with sickle cell anemia.

In South Africa, former apartheid prisoner Jacob Moatshe uses electronic mail to make contacts to help his township of Oukasie, 60 miles (100 kilometers) northwest of Johannesburg.

"In the old (apartheid) days, nobody wanted to develop Oukasie. Now we have to convert our struggle from being militant to a struggle for development," Moatshe said.

In a township where old car tires weigh down corrugated metal roofs so the wind does not blow them away, Moatshe sends e-mail with a computer donated by the U.S. government.

He uses e-mail to pitch Oukasie as a hub for business development in South Africa and to keep in touch with local teachers training in Berkeley, California, Oukasie's sister city.

Tanzanian officials expect to use the Internet in their 10- year master plan to promote the tourist industry, which is expected to be Tanzania's top foreign exchange earner by 2000. The project is being financed with $261 million from the European Union.

In Phnom Penh, Cambodia, residents will soon be able to literally step off a muddy, pot-holed street near the central market into "virtual markets" at the country's first computer cafe.

Housed in a former restaurant, the cafe is being set up by a Cambodian professional association to provide public Internet access to everyone from lawyers to bicycle cabbies.

From coffee growers in Costa Rica to tea merchants in Sri Lanka, people in different parts of the developing world see the huge potential of a global network that lets them go right to customers sitting at their home computers.

In India, where a junior executive in a private company makes about 10,000 rupees a month -- about $285 -- a basic Internet connection without graphics ability costs 5,800 rupees ($166) a month.

But in many parts of the developing world access to the Internet -- for those who have even heard of it -- is still largely unobtainable.

Eighty-five percent of the people in poor countries do not have telephones and only a privileged 5 percent have computers. Poor and intermittent telephone service often makes just a simple telephone call an accomplishment.

"The omnipresence of the Internet in the Northern Hemisphere obviously is something that is not at all duplicated in the Southern Hemispheric countries," said Michael Stein, program director of the Institute for Global Concern, a San Francisco-based Internet provider that serves non-profit organizations around the world.

In many places, the legal and bureaucratic hurdles that must be cleared to set up a link to the Internet may be staggering or even insurmountable. Some countries forbid direct access. Many developing countries let only people who work for multinational corporations or non-governmental organizations that get international money have access to the Internet.

Poverty is another major stumbling block. Where Internet access is available, the cost may be prohibitive.

In India, where a junior executive in a private company makes about 10,000 rupees a month -- about $285 -- a basic Internet connection without graphics ability costs 5,800 rupees ($166) a month.

Despite the stumbling blocks, the Internet is sure to expand its role in the development of the global village.

Grandfathers may have walked across town to buy a shirt. But his executive grandson can tap into the Web site of the Shamsi Group in Cairo, which makes dress shirts of fine Egyptian cotton that sell in stores like Harrods of London.

Shamsi's development manager, Nader Lahzy, said the company used to rely on brochures, videos and old-fashioned sale representatives to market its garments.

But with the Internet, he said, "I have broader access to the outside market and I can reach more target customers." (AP)

Children or the Adults?

WASHINGTON -- The government formally unveiled a plan Monday to make automobile air bags safer for children but acknowledged it could cost the lives of more than 1,000 adults each year.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) proposed rules to take some of the punch out of air bags could save between 39 and 83 of the 128 children who might be crushed each year if no change occurs.

At the same time, the weaker bags could lead to the deaths of 280 adult passengers not wearing seatbelts and 207 drivers, most of them with belts.

Another version of the plan favored by car makers might kill 378 adult passengers and 825 unbelted drivers, the government says.

Ricardo Martinez, NHTSA administrator, has expressed doubts about the wisdom of the proposed rules. But the National Safety Council, a consumer group, says the government is moving in the right direction.

"We have a higher obligation to protect children than unbelted adults," said Chuck Hurley, the Safety Council's spokesman. "Children can't protect themselves and depend upon parents, care-givers and the government to protect them. Adults have a choice -- they can choose to put on seat belts or not."

Air bags, which deploy like huge pillows at speeds up to 320 kilometers (200 miles) per hour, have saved thousands of lives. But they also have been blamed for the deaths of 30 children and 19 adult drivers, mostly women under 1.6 meters (5 feet 4 inches).

On Monday, NHTSA also proposed a regulation that would authorize automakers to reduce the deployment force of air bags until "smart" technology is phased into new motor vehicles.

Such technology, which the government wants to see in place by the 1999 model year, would equip cars with air bags capable of determining passenger size. The bags would then inflate at speeds that would do no harm.

In another proposal, dealers and repair shops would be permitted to deactivate the air bags for any vehicle owner who requests it.

At present, federal law prohibits dealers from making any safety equipment inoperative.

If the proposal became law, it would offer parents who must transport children in the front seat and others with special medical needs "an expedited legal avenue" to turn off the airbags, the NHTSA said.

The agency is now accepting public comments on the two proposals and hopes to have them implemented before the start of model year 1998.

"It is important to add that children age 12 and under should always ride in the back seat, buckled up, and away from the air bag," said Martinez.

"Regulatory actions will make tomorrow's air bags safer for children, but too many are at risk in the interim if parents do not insist children ride in the back seat."

NHTSA also extended an existing policy of allowing manufacturers to install manual cut-off switches that would deactivate an air bag in vehicles without a back seat or with a back seat too small to install a child safety carrier.

NTHSA's announcement drew praise from the American Automobile Manufacturers Association, a trade unit grouping General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

"America's car companies welcome today's rulemakings by NHTSA on air bag safety," said AAMA president Andrew Card.

"We're also pleased by NHTSA's announcement of an expedited public comment period and urge the agency to reach final decisions as soon as possible.

"Speeding up the rulemaking process -- and including the industry's depowering option in the final rules -- will enable automakers to put depowered air bags in new vehicles sooner.

"The federal government must act quickly if automakers are to bring depowered air bags to the marketplace in time for the 1998 model year." (AFP)

Best Desktop System of 1996

Winner

Compaq Deskpro 6000

The Deskpro 6000 range helps confirm Compaq's position at the front of the PC technology stakes. While the range incorporates many technical innovations, one of the most impressive is Compaq's inclusion of self-monitoring analysis and reporting technology (SMART) IDE and SCSI hard drives in a desktop system. SMART drives aren't new, but they've traditionally been used in RAID systems, so their use in a desktop machine helped clinch the award for Compaq. This technology allows drives to constantly monitor their own behavior and performance, and for the system to use this information to predict impending failures. This gives you the opportunity to back up your data and replace the drive before a serious system failure occurs, Compaq even offers a pre-failure warranty.

The 6000 range also feature Compaq's Intelligent Manageability technology, which lets network managers exercise far greater remote control over their PCs than ever before. This, combined with DMI compliance, means that the Deskpro 6000 range offers a high level of manageability, a factor that's of increasing importance to managers who have to account for larger numbers of PCs.

Optional extras include an IrDA transceiver for infra-red data transfer between compatible devices, such as laptops, and a PD-CD drive, which acts as a 4-speed CD-ROM drive but is also a 650Mb rewriteable optical drive. The range starts with a 166Mhz Pentium system and covers a variety of configurations up to a 200 Mhz Pentium Pro-based machine, the 6200. This latter system, reviewed in PC Magazine, October 1996, achieved an impressive Winstone 32 score of 143.5, making it a great performer as well as a highly innovative and well designed workstation.

Runner Up

Hewlett-Packard Vectra XA

This Hewlett-Packard system was nominated for a Technical Innovation award largely because of its innovative use of Magic Packet technology on a network card designed cooperatively by HP and AMD. This allows a system administrator to exercise a high degree of control over the machine via the network. By using a soft switch, the PC can be switched on or off remotely by sending a Magic Packet over the network. This technology could prove useful for MIS managers, who'd easily be able to power up all of the machines on their networks at will. The BIOS also allows the spacebar to be defined as a power on key.

On top of this innovation, the Vectra XA is a well-designed machine in all respects. It manages to cram a lot of technology into a small space and still return top-notch performance figures. The case can be opened without tools, and the motherboard simply unlatches and slides out of the unit. The power supply can also be removed without having to undo any screws. The machine currently ships with a 200 Mhz Pentium Pro processor, but has facilities to cope with future 233 Mhz and 266 Mhz versions of the chip when they become available. This was without doubt one of the best designed desktop PC systems we saw all year.

Runner Up

Acer Aspire

Acer's Aspire range of home PCs is the first to make a success of breaking the traditional beige box mould and presenting the PC as a straight forward consumer item. Very much in the vein of a television or video, the Aspire has been designed to assimilate easily and inconspicuously into any living room or bedroom. While this might not have been seen as technically innovative in the traditional sense, it's important for progress to be made in this area if the PC is ever to realize its full potential as the complete communications, education, entertainment and business system.

The most obvious difference between the Aspire and other PCs is its physical appearance. The machines base unit, monitor stylish and above all unconventional aesthetic design which gives the machines the appearance of a desirable piece of consumer electronics, rather than something you'd find on an accountant's desk. The systems include such innovative features as a built-in telephone that clips onto the side of your monitor and utilizes a built-in voice mail system. When not in use the PC lies idle, but can restart in around three seconds in order to receive incoming faxes, email or telephone calls. All this has been achieved while still ensuring the PC runs almost silently.

In short, with the Aspire range Acer has gone one step further than any other PC manufacturer, by putting a large amount of thought into the design of a PC that offers home users the integrated multimedia system they've been promised for years.

(Courtesy PC Magazine)

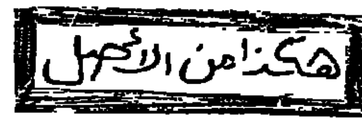
Cologne Elephants Pine for Christmas Tree Chow

COLOGNE, Germany -- Once the Christmas festivities are over, trunkloads of unused Christmas trees wind up in the stomachs of the African elephants in the Cologne Zoo, and the beasts are delighted with the prickly presents, the zoo said recently.

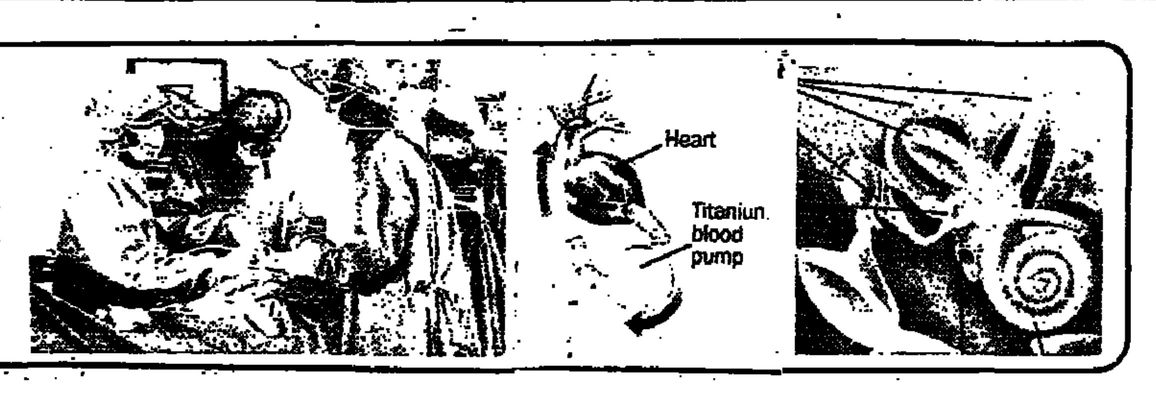
A Cologne Christmas tree seller sends his unsold trees to the zoo, free, and elephants Tanga, Preti and Sawani gobble them up.

Deer, bison and rhinoceroses also get part of the booty.

Zoo Director Guenther Nogge notes that the animals eat only fresh trees, and "we can't do anything with Christmas trees people bring us after use. They're dry and full of tallow or pieces of decorations". (AFP)







THOUGHT

A man is the slave of his habits. So, if you are to choose your own masters why not choose good ones. *Anonymous writer*

PRAYER

Noon	12:08
Evening	17:24
Dawn (tomorrow)	05:36
Sunrise (tomorrow)	07:15

White House Announces Opposition to Medical Use of Marijuana

WASHINGTON — The White House went to battle against the legal medical use of marijuana in Arizona and California, insisting the federal ban on the drug's use remained in force.

The two western U.S. states on November 5 approved in referenda the legal prescription of the drug, sometimes used to ease symptoms of eye ailments, cancer and AIDS.

That created a legal problem given the federal law against marijuana use.

Attorney general Janet Reno made it plain at a press conference recently, saying "federal law still applies."

She said the referenda sent the wrong message to young people in the United States, among whom marijuana use was up in 1996.

The Justice Department plans to take legal action against physicians who prescribe marijuana for their patients and any federal employees who use the drug, said General Barry Mccaffrey, President Bill Clinton's policy coordinating "drug czar."

"We're going to send a clear message to all federal employees, to all federal contractors, to all organizations receiving federal funds, and to all employees who work with the safety of the American public, that schedule one drugs (such as marijuana) are against the law and won't be tolerated," Mccaffrey said.

The California and Arizona votes which passed with solid majorities allow any patient whose doctor chooses to prescribe the drug to ease symptoms or pain.

The referenda rules also allow patients to grow and possess marijuana under a doctor-prescribed treatment program, which is strictly forbidden under federal law.

But they impose no limit on production levels, do not set an authorized consumption amount or establish a limited list of the ailments for which the drug can be prescribed legally.

The "states' rights" clash between federal and local jurisdictions is a big one, and one likely to make it quickly to the Supreme Court, observers said.

Americans for medical rights plan to sue the federal government, claiming the new policy aimed at convicting participating doctors violates their free speech rights.

A spokesman for Santa Monica-based group, which helped raise money to put the measure on the California ballot, said doctors will seek an injunction to keep the federal governments policy from going into effect.

"The government is trying to keep doctors from stating their opinons and that's a violation of their first amendment rights," said Bill Zimmerman.

The government has "decided to proceed with his most deplorable and indefensible option — targeting physicians," he added.

"This strategy is a measure of our government's hysteria over marijuana," Zimmerman said. "Doctors must now fear federal agents simply for informing their patients that this particular drug might help them."

Scott Imler, director of the cannabis buyers club in west Hollywood, predicted doctors will find a way around the ban by recommending rather than prescribing the drug.

A federal Health and Human Services (HHS) department study showed marijuana use among the young was up this year with 44. 9 percent of students saying they had smoked it at least once — up from 41. 7 percent in 1995.

HHS secretary Donna Shalala said young people had grown less aware of the dangers associated with the drug.

"This administration is opposed to the legalization of marijuana," she said. Research "has concluded that marijuana is dangerous to our health, marijuana harms the brain, the heart, the lungs and our immune system."

If the current data are discouraging, at least they are better than those from 1979 when 60. 4 percent of secondary school students said they had used marijuana at least once.

The active chemical ingredient in marijuana, THC, is relatively controversy-free and widely available in the United States in synthetic form with a doctor's prescription.

(AFP)

Report Sees Twofold Increase in Skin Cancer

LONDON — Cases of skin cancer could quadruple by the year 2100 if ozone-depeleting chemicals were not restricted, scientists reported recently.

Even with current agreements to reduce production of such chemicals, skin cancer cases will double, they said in a report in the science journal *Nature*.

Harry Slaper and colleagues at the Netherlands Institute of Public Health and the Environment said their findings showed how important it was to restrict production of such chemicals.

They based their findings on a complex analysis of current cases, skin cancer tests on mice and projections of ozone levels, they wrote in the science journal *Nature*.

A 1985 agreement known as the Vienna Convention set up a framework for reducing production of chemicals that harm the ozone layer. These include chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs), used widely in refrigeration and aerosols.

They react with oxygen in the ozone layer, which protects the earth from the sun's ultraviolet radiation. Such radiation not only damages crops but causes skin cancer.

So countries agreed to cut chemical production. In 1987 a plan for phasing out production was signed in Montreal — although there have been problems implementing it.

CFC production was banned worldwide in January. But there is still a significant black market in the chemical.

For the scenario in which no restrictions were placed on chemicals the researchers assumed a three percent annual increase in production of CFCs, halons and methyl chloroform under Montreal, production of the five major offenders is supposed to be dropped to 50 percent by 1999.

We evaluated the skin cancer types: squamous cell carcinoma, basal cell carcinoma, the most frequent but least aggressive, and cutaneous malignant melanoma, the least frequent but most aggressive, they wrote.

Skin cancer cases due to ozone depletion would double in the United States under the Montreal Agreement, they found. But they would have more than quadrupled had there been no agreement.

They would grow two percent if all production of ozone-depleting chemicals had stopped at the end of 1995. Figures were just slightly lower for northwest Europe.

These results demonstrate the importance of the international measures agreed upon under the Vienna Convention, the researchers wrote.

Current cancer rates are about two per thousand in the United States each year and a little more than half that in Europe.

A second report in nature found that the ozone hole over Antarctica would start to heal by the early part of the next century, provided agreements are honored.

David Hofmann of the U.S. weather service NOAA said the first signs would be seen by 2008. The ozone layer would then continue to heal slowly, reaching pre-ozone hole levels by about the year 2050, he wrote.

(Reuter)

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D2	D2	H4	C3	E1	I1	I1	2nd Letter Double — RACK 3
W4	D2	L1	L1	O1	E1	E1	3rd Letter Triple — RACK 4

PAR SCORE 60-70

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL ____
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7- letter word from the letters in each row. To total points of your words, use scoring directions to right of each row. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words can be found in OSW Official Scrabble Words (Chambers). JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

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Here is the solution to yesterday's Scrabble

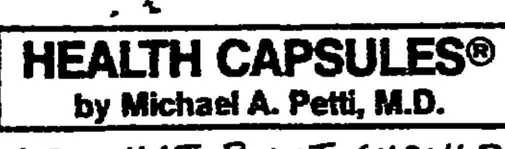
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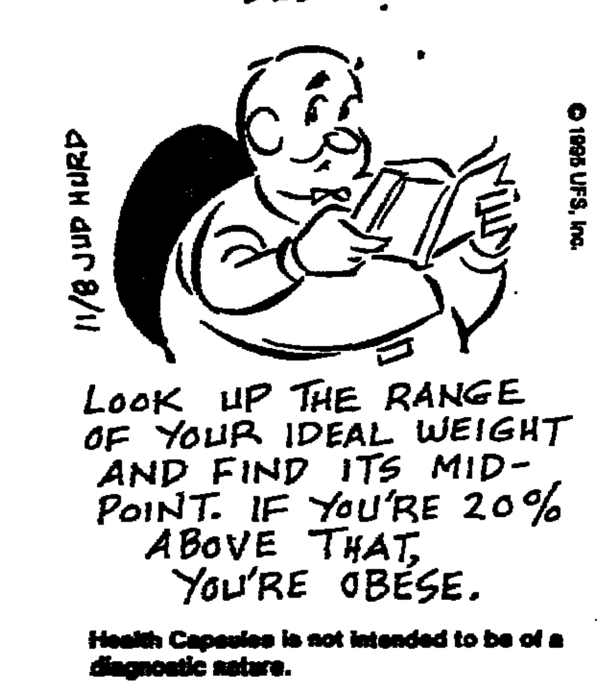
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S1	P3	I1	N1	O1	U1	T1	RACK 1 =	59
D2	A1	M3	P3	I1	S1	H4	RACK 2 =	67
B3	E1	H4	E1	A1	D2	S1	RACK 3 =	64
M3	O1	U1	L1	D2	E1	R1	RACK 4 =	60
G2	A1	L1	A1	S1			RACK 5 =	18

PAR SCORE 175-185 JUDD'S TOTAL 268

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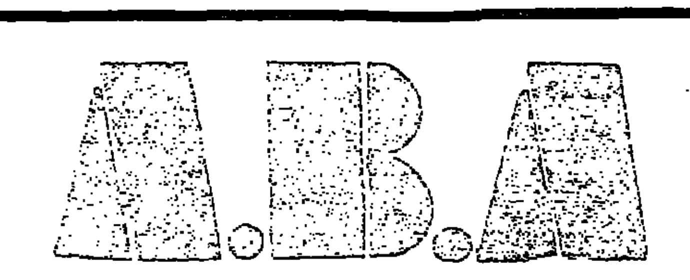




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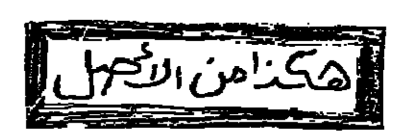
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Mandela Promises a Year of Action

PRETORIA — President Nelson Mandela on Tuesday committed his government to a year of action in 1997, saying the emphasis will be on speeding up the implementation of reconstruction and development programs.

In his New Year's message, Mandela said South Africa's first democratically elected government had reached the halfway mark in its term of office and the impact of reconstruction and development was beginning to be felt.

"In short, we have laid solid foundations: the challenge for 1997 is to build on them." Highlighting some of the events of 1996, Mandela said the signing into law of the new constitution on December 10 was a fitting end to a year in which local government elections were completed "to ensure that we do indeed govern ourselves." "The challenge now is to ensure that these constitutional rights become a living reality," he said.

Mandela warned that 1997 would be a testing time for government, business, labor, producers and consumers but urged South Africans to keep their sights on the long-term.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is probing human rights abuses during the apartheid years, he said, had proved itself a powerful instrument of healing and reconciliation.

South Africans could also be proud of the increased access to domestic water, electricity and health care and of a national education system bringing quality education to all.

The government, he added, are winning the war against crime thanks to the efforts of the security forces and of ordinary citizens.

"We have taken the war to the criminals and we are gaining the upper hand," Mandela said. "This we owe to our security forces and to every South African who has joined the campaign to combat crime." *(AFP)*

Politics and Business Don't Mix: Italian President

ROME — Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro called Tuesday for a new relationship between politics and business to get rid of the air of corruption hanging over the country.

"Let us free ourselves of the entanglement between politics and business, which is causing so much damage," he said in a New Year's address carried on television and radio.

Italy has been rocked over the past few years by a series of scandals and reports of corruption reaching up to the highest levels of politics. *(AFP)*



PANMUNJOM, Republic of Korea (Dec. 30): A North Korean honor guard drapes wooden coffins with red "martyr" flags after the ashes of 24 crewmen from an intruding submarine were handed back at the border post of Panmujom. The repatriation of the remains ended three months of tension between the two Koreas. *(AFP PHOTO)*

Slovakian President Rejects Controversial Anti-Subversion Law

BRATISLAVA — Slovakian President Michal Kovac on Tuesday sent back to Parliament a controversial bill that would add an anti-subversion amendment to the penal code, approved two weeks ago in a parliamentary vote boycotted by the opposition.

Kovac said in a letter to Parliament that he opposed in particular clauses that would allow those who organized public rallies, strikes and calls for civil disobedience to be imprisoned for three years.

By rejecting the bill, the Slovakian head of state is forcing a new reading in which he urged the MPs to oppose a text he said aimed to "destroy the Slovakian constitutional system" and the country's "territorial integrity." Of the 150 deputies in Parliament, only 66 — members of Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar's coalition — voted for the measure and five against, while the remainder left the hall in protest over the bill, which also drew criticism from European and U.S. officials.

Kovac said Tuesday that the amendment was "unacceptable in its entirety" and that its adoption would "contravene several articles of the constitution." He recalled in his letter that he had already sent back an earlier version of the bill that had also been approved by Meciar's supporters, and that Parliament's failure to re-debate this version contravened the constitution. *(AFP)*

Yeltsin Seeks "Better" Year in 1997

MOSCOW — Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday wished his countrymen a better year in 1997, which he hoped would be marked by greater order in Russia and a resolution to the non-payments crisis crippling the government.

In a new year's address to the nation, Yeltsin singled out the non-payment of pensions and salaries and the burgeoning crime rate as the key issues to tackle in 1997.

"The most important thing next year is that there are no more delays in the payment of pensions and salaries and that order finally reigns in our country," Yeltsin said.

"I believe that the coming year will be a year of understanding and reconciliation in Russia," Yeltsin said, repeating a call for harmony which he issued to his political enemies on Monday.

"We only have one country, one Russia and we ourselves, our children and grandchildren must live there."

The Russian president thanked the people for re-electing him in July for a second term in the Kremlin and for supporting him through his heart illness which culminated in bypass surgery in November.

"I consider it my duty to respond to your support and your confidence," Yeltsin said. *(AP)*

Harsh Winter Storm Wreaks Havoc in U.S., Canada

SEATTLE, Washington — The second winter storm in three days pounded the western United States and Canada recently, creating blizzard conditions, icing and flooding over a wide area.

A swath of snow and ice blanketed western Washington State from the Canadian border — which remained under a blizzard warning — to Portland, Oregon, nearly 320 kilometers (200 miles) south.

A state of emergency was declared in one county in the region, where there were snow drifts up to three meters (ten feet) high and winds gusting up to 160 kilometers (100 miles) per hour.

In Canada, massive snow brought Vancouver to a virtual standstill, as roads were closed throughout southern British Columbia, an area that usually sees little snowfall.

Meteorologists warned residents of Victoria, the provincial capital, that they could get as much as a meter (three feet) of more snow in the next few days after a record 80 centimeters (32 inches) of snow fell last week.

More than half of Victoria's residents are retirees who escaped from other parts of Canada because the city rarely has any snow.

Neither Victoria nor any of its neighboring communities on Vancouver island has any snow-moving equipment.

Local authorities and residents were trying unsuccessfully Sunday to use bulldozers and other construction industry equipment to reopen some of the streets to traffic.

On the mainland, where local authorities do have snow-moving equipment, the Christmas week snowstorm — described by environment Canada as the worst in 75 years — left scores of motorists stranded in the Fraser Valley, east of Vancouver.

A swath of snow and ice blanketed western Washington State from the Canadian border — which remained under a blizzard warning — to Portland, Oregon, nearly 320 kilometers (200 miles) south.

And the situation will only get worse, according to Brian Hammond of Environment Canada.

"Over the last several days," he said, "we've had a few minor systems come in that have given us five to 15 centimeters (two to six inches). But with (an expected new snowstorm) we're talking considerably more than that — as high as 30 centimeters (12 inches)."

High winds have accompanied the record snowfalls.

Neil Gaudreau managed to get from a gas station in Abbotsford to a nearby church where he has been stranded for most of the weekend.

"It's a mess out there," he said. "The wind is just howling. I was sitting at (the gas station) in the car and the wind just about lifted it."

Tim Van Alstine moved to Victoria from Edmonton, Alberta, which is notorious for its harsh winters.

"Even in Edmonton, it doesn't snow in these amounts all at once," he complained.

High winds also buffeted coastlines as far south as Oregon's Tillamook County, where wind gusts blew out windows and felled power lines.

By dawn, snow had turned to rain from Seattle southward, where temperatures were likely to stay above freezing Sunday, National Weather Service meteorologist Sten Tjaden said.

But steady rain and melting snow posed new threats. A roof in northern Washington's Port Orchard collapsed, sinking dozens of boats. Up to 200 cars lie trapped under a carport roof in Edmonds, and in another town the roof of a drug store caved in.

Television reports showed homes floating on Seattle's lakes. In some areas homeowners scrambled to their roofs to scoop away heavy, sodden snow.

Seattle's airport reported only about 60 percent of scheduled flights were able to take off and land Sunday. Mountain roads were closed.

Portland International Airport Spokesman Darell Buttice told CNN the airport "had power outages twice this morning," adding "we couldn't run the jetways to load or unload passengers."

"It was a very trying time for everyone," Buttice said.

The storm front extended as far south as California. San Francisco was experiencing heavy rains and the National Weather Service issued an advisory for winds up to 100 kilometers (60 miles) per hour.

Heavy rains on Thursday and Friday were blamed for dozens of traffic accidents and at least two freeway closures around Los Angeles on Friday.

Saturday and Sunday were both fair, but more rain was predicted for early in the week, prompting fears that the New Year's day Rose Parade in Pasadena would be rained on for the first time in 40 years.

The Weather Service issued a special weather statement for perennially sunny southern California saying that "we are quite certain it will be a wet week."

(AFP)

Dutch Biologists Discover 10 Species of Insects

THE HAGUE — Dutch biologists have discovered 10 new species of insects, including five kinds of mosquito and five new ichneumons — insects belonging to the wasp family — Dutch national radio reported recently.

The discovery was made thanks to a study in an ecological zone near the southern town of Udenhout.

Some 300,000 insects deriving from 2,000 different species were caught in the region between March and November 1990, the radio reported.

It took the scientists six years to examine all the insects, after which they identified the 10 new species. They also identified 200 insects that had never before been seen in the Netherlands.

(AFP)

Digital Celebris GL6200

A well-designed PC and an excellent performer, Digital's 200 Mhz Pentium Pro-based Celebris GL6200 would make an ideal high-end workstation, or even a credible entry-level server.

The Celebris GL6200 is a 200 Mhz Pentium Pro PC featuring Digital's innovative design, which allows the motherboard to be removed by flipping open two catches and sliding it out. This gives easy access to critical components like the processor, RAM, BIOS and on-board video system should these need to be upgraded or repaired. The voltage regulator is built onto a removeable plug-in board, which means that it can be replaced if a new CPU is installed that requires a different voltage.

The 200 Mhz Pentium Pro CPU works in conjunction with a 256K SRAM Level 2 cache, Phoenix version 4.05 BIOS and 32Mb two of which are occupied. The two PCI and four ISA slots are left free, thanks to the subsystem's being incorporated into the system's design. This includes the 3Com Etherlink II adapter, which is built onto a daughterboard mounted on the machine's case. The integral audio system, based on an ESS1888 chipset, uses a similar arrangement, and — like the network adapter — can be disabled easily if you want to install an alternative device.

Both the Toshiba six-speed CD-ROM drive and Quantum Fireball 2Gb hard disk are IDE devices, running from the system's integral controller. The hard drive uses SMART technology and will warn you of an imminent failure by displaying a red disk access light.

The GL6200 is DMI compliant, and comes with Digital's ClientWORKS software, which helps users and system managers keep abreast of the status of the network. As well as the usual I/O ports, the GL6200 features two Universal Serial Bus (USB) ports, which will be useful when USB peripherals become widely available in 1997.

The Matrox Millenium video subsystem, which is built onto the motherboard, provides a maximum resolution of 1,280 by 1,024 with 256 colors, plus the usual combination of lower resolutions and more colors.

The PC comes with 2Mb of video memory, which can't be upgraded. As a result, we were unable to run our high-end benchmark software on the GL6200 as it requires a minimum of 4Mb of video RAM. Even so, the machine delivered a very impress Business Winstone 97 score, and is well-designed in all respects.

(Courtesy PC Magazine)

Japan Discovers the Power of Grass-Roots Movements

MITAKE, Japan — Like other out-of-the-way, easygoing places in Japan, Mitake, a former mining town, rarely saw its 20,000 residents challenge authority.

But that was before its outspoken mayor tried to keep an industrial waste disposal facility out of town, and he was nearly murdered by thugs in his apartment building.

"What frightened me was that no one would be able to speak up after the mayor got attacked. This may be a hick town. But the flame of democracy hasn't died here yet."

Police suspect organized crime in the October 30 bludgeoning of Mayor Yoshiro Yanagawa, including gangs who stood to profit from the waste plant.

The crime prompted Mitake to take an unusual step: to schedule a referendum giving voters a chance to demand that the state government reverse its approval of the facility.

Mitake, 270 kilometers (170 miles) west of Tokyo, is one of several communities in Japan that are turning to referendums to present their demands to the government.

Although the referendums aren't binding, they are winning praise nationwide as milestones of democracy. In fact, they are emerging as striking examples of grass-roots action in the face of a political system that tends to demand respectful compliance from citizens to their state and national governments.

Earlier this year, residents of the northwestern town of Maki voted "no" to a planned nuclear power plant.

Residents in Okinawa used their referendum to demand a reduction in U.S. military bases on their southern islands.

"What frightened me was that no one would be able to speak up after the mayor got attacked," said Tamotsu Tanaka, 59, a businessman who led the call for the Mitake referendum. "This may be a hick town. But the flame of democracy hasn't died here yet."

Within a week of the assault, Tanaka and other volunteers had collected 1,151 signatures, far more than the 303 required by law for the referendum. It must be held before June, and it will ask whether the village residents want the facility.

"There is no other way they can have their voice heard," said Jun-Ichi Kyogoku, honorary professor of political science at Tokyo University. "In Japan, it has long been the practice for the government to make the decisions, looking down on the people as not knowing any better."

Planned for construction by a river that provides drinking water to several million people, the plant — the size of some 30 baseball fields — will collect rubber, plastic, wood scraps and other debris from major manufacturers across the nation.

Opponents fear pollution to the air and water.

Mayor Yanagawa, 63, is also sticking to his stand.

Hospitalized for 40 days, Yanagawa only returned to work December 9.

"To try to defeat someone through violence is unforgivable," he said in an interview in an apartment he is using as an office while recuperating. "I may have been hurt physically, but they haven't done a bit of harm to my spirit."

There have been no arrests in the attack, but police suspect retaliation for the mayor's policies.

"When I ask myself why this happened to me, there really is no other possible explanation," Yanagawa said.

Ganpachi Suzuki, spokesman for Toshiwa Kogyo, the company proposing the plant, denied any involvement in the attack.

Since 1991, Toshiwa Kogyo has invested hundreds of millions of yen (millions of dollars) to move a dozen homes from the site. The company has also promised Mitake 3.5 billion yen ($31 million), about half Mitake's annual budget, over 15 years in compensation.

"To try to defeat someone through violence is unforgivable. I may have been hurt physically, but they haven't done a bit of harm to my spirit."

A no-nonsense man who towers over most Japanese at 181 centimeters (six feet), Yanatawa wasted no time in removing the shroud of secrecy that traditionally surrounded the village assembly.

What surfaced were records showing that the previous administration had secretly given its support to the waste project. The project became the top issue in a local election that sent 12 new members, all of whom questioned the plan, to the 18-member village assembly.

That was when the trouble began.

Newsletters published by right-wing extremist groups began accusing Yanagawa of foolishly banning a profitable project.

Thugs began showing up at residents' meetings, making sure participants knew they were being watched.

By the end of August, a recording of conversations Yanagawa had on his home phone turned up. An acquaintance found a wiretap on his line.

"We never believed they would resort to this," Takako Okamoto, 42, a housewife, said of the ambush on Yanagawa.

"But now my determination is stronger than ever," she said, looking forward the referendum that will allow her to support him.

(AP)

Matsushita Puts India Plans in Cold Storage

BOMBAY — Japan's Matsushita Industrial Electric Co. Ltd. has put its ambitious growth plans in India on hold, citing a slowing consumer electronics market and poor response to its products, a report said recently.

The leading business daily, the *Economic Times*, said Matsushita, the world's largest consumer electronics company, earlier this year planned to invest more than $200 million in India.

The investment was to cover the manufacture of home appliances, compressors, auto insertion machinery, video casette recorders and telecom equipment.

It also planned to invest in a research and development facility as well as to increase the paid-up capital of its Indian subsidiary National Panasonic India Ltd. from the present $7.2 million to $11.4 million.

The newspaper, quoting unnamed sources in the company, said: "Matsushita has now decided to defer all these plans, based on the less than average response that its products have got in India, and the slowdown in the consumer electronics market.

"Two years ago, when the company entered India, it had projected an annual growth rate of 25 percent in the consumer electronics market.

"Based on this figure, Matsushita had also forecast sales of $1 billion by the turn of the century."

But actual growth this year is expected to be about 10 percent and Matsushita's sales are not expected to cross 3 billion rupees ($85 million) in the 12 months to March 1997, the newspaper said.

It said the appointment of T. Nakajima as managing director of National Panasonic India Ltd. was also one of the reasons for Matsushita's Indian plans being put on hold.

"Following the appointment ... the company has adopted a wait and watch attitude to the Indian market. Nakajima refused to comment on Matsushita's strategy for the new year, saying it was under formulation," it said.

The *Economic Times* said the Japanese company's earlier plans were to put up a new, $100 million venture with India's Videocon Group to produce refrigerators, washing machines and air-conditioners at a factory near New Delhi.

"This has been cut down to an initial investment of just 150 million rupees ($4.28 million) for assembling air- conditioners in Madras. Videocon and Matsushita have also yet to agree on the equity structure of the new company," said the newspaper.

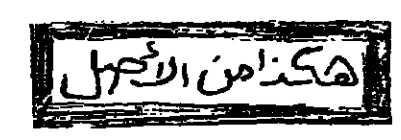
The earlier investment plan also included $50 million for a compressor and auto insertion machinery factory and $25 million in a factory to turn out 200,000 video casette recorders every year.

Matsushita had also planned to put in $30 million to manufacture telecom equipment in India.

The company had also planned to invest $5 million in a training, research and development center by early 1997 to adapt several of its products to Indian conditions.

Matsushita markets its products under the National, Panasonic, Technics and Quasar brand names, said the newspaper.

(AFP)



Ghanaian Kofi Annan Takes Over as UN Chief

UNITED NATIONS — Ghana's Kofi Annan took office Wednesday as the seventh UN secretary-general, following the departure of his predecessor Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Fifty-eight-year-old Annan is to receive a full honor guard on Thursday when he arrives at UN headquarters in New York, as Wednesday was a public holiday in the United States.

Annan is the ultimate UN insider, having spent his 30-year career in the UN system.

Boutros-Ghali was leaving Wednesday for a two-day stopover in Paris, before heading to his native Egypt where he plans to write his UN memoirs and a book on the Camp Savid peace process.

Boutros-Ghali, 74, was ousted at the end of his first term as UN chief after Washington vetoed his candidacy for a second five-year mandate.

Traditionally, UN chiefs serve out two terms, according to a geographical rotation. Annan, the first African from south of the Sahara to become the world's top diplomat, won election as the representative of Africa after Boutros-Ghali put his name on hold following the U.S. veto.

The Egyptian diplomat told reporters on Tuesday that he was leaving "with no bitterness.".

Summing up his tenure, he said: "I believe that I have tried to maintain a minumum of independence for the United Nations. And I believe that I was not successful to overcome the financial crisis."

Annan, whose election has been warmly welcomed by the Clinton administration, has pledged to make solving the financial crisis a main priority.

The crisis was triggered by Washington attaching conditions to its payment of UN arrears, now totalling $1.3 billion.

As former undersecretary-general for peacekeeping, Annan plans to develop UN readiness to intervene in crises before they explode into full-scale conflicts.

He recognises that the main challenge is on his own continent, with Central African states of the great lakes region torn by ethnic turmoil, while countries such as Angola advance along the road to peace prodded by the United Nations. (AFP)



Bye Bye Boutros: UN Chief Leaves Office After Five Years

UNITED NATIONS — UN Chief Boutros Boutros-Ghali left office Tuesday at the end of a five-year term, saying that his greatest achievement had been to preserve the world body's independence.

The 74-year-old Egyptian left the UN building to warm applause from his staff after shaking hands with aides and staff members who were waiting to bid him goodbye.

He told reporters he was leaving with "no bitterness at all," following Washington's veto of his reelection. He is to be replaced on Wednesday by Kofi Annan of Ghana, until now the undersecretary-general responsible for peacekeeping.

Asked to specify his main achievement and his biggest single failure as UN chief, he replied: "I believe that I have tried to maintain a minumum of independence for the United Nations. And I believe that I was not successful to overcome the financial crisis."

Washington's failure to pay its UN dues was a major bone of contention between Boutros-Ghali and the U.S. administration. Washington is refusing to pay $1.3 billion in arrears to the world body, making up almost half of the financially-strapped organization's total debt of 2.2 billion.

Boutros-Ghali was among prominent officials asked by the New York Times to contribute a New Year's resolution suggestion to President Bill Clinton.

"President Clinton should keep last year's resolution," said Boutros-Ghali in Tuesday's edition of the newspaper.

"He promised to veto the resolution recommending my reelection as secretary-general, and then to pay what the United States owes the United Nations. He's fulfilled the first part of his pledge, now he is obligated to fulfil the second."

Boutros-Ghali spent his last morning at his 38th floor office posing for photo opportunities, notably with about 50 Egyptian members of staff, and with the UN General Assembly President, Razali Ismail of Malaysia.

But he made it clear that he did not intend to spend a quiet retirement. He pledged Tuesday that he would continue to serve the United Nations "in different capacities, among them as an eminent person."

He also stressed that he would be available to his government and to the international community for any mission which would further "peace, development and democracy."

Boutros-Ghali left New York on Wednesday for a stopover in Paris on his way back to Egypt where he plans to write books. He returns to Cairo on Friday. (AFP)

Thousands of Homeless in Tokyo's Winter Streets

TOKYO — Japan may be a model of economic prosperity in booming Asia, but thousands of homeless haunt streets and parks in its wealthy cities and around 20 die of cold and sickness in Tokyo alone every winter.

For the first time this year, municipal authorities took a count of homeless people in Tokyo and put the number at 3,300, of which some 1,000 were in the poor district of Sanya and 550 among the skyscrapers of ultra-modern Shinjuku.

But not all accept the official assessment.



"This figure is too low," said Sister Hatsuki Murakami, manager of the Tokyo branch of French Charity Emmaus.

"I've heard it said that, in the opinion of volunteers who help the homeless, there are in reality more than 10,000.

"In Japan, despite the apparent prosperity, there are many situations of urgency and of distress. These generally need help. When the public services don't do their social work, the marginalized and impoverished find themselves completely alone."

In Sanya the homeless are, for the most part, elderly or ill who can't find casual work or afford to pay for a bed in the dormitories of down-market hotels in the area.

Early every morning, the agents for construction projects go to Sanya to choose their workers for the day. But the oldest of the homeless, sometimes only 50 but with bodies worn out by work and alcohol, just lie on the floor.

"They say every winter around 20 people without shelter are found dead in the mornings on the pavement in Tokyo," said Ryoichi Ando, head of a social work center in Sanya.

"It isn't only the cold. They have often had too much to drink and go to sleep but never wake up."

In Shinjuku and in the parks, many of the homeless live in cardboard boxes, where they find a little privacy by squeezing in with their few belongings.

Their possessions usually include some threadbare clothes, cooking utensils and some old books and comics.

Last January, several hundred homeless people were forcibly removed by police from a railway underpass near Shinjuku's train station.

Municipal authorities then opened a prefabricated temporary shelter at Nagisa, far from the city center, on Vacant Land near Tokyo Bay.

The center was closed in March but has opened again this winter. It has some 1,800 beds and is surrounded by wire fencing, in the fashion of a detention center.

The boarders can get food and bathe. There are strict rules and the lights are turned out and the doors locked a little after sunset.

Many of the homeless prefer to have more freedom, and live in the streets.

But not all of the homeless are paupers. There are some who decided to quit the rigid constraints of Japanese society, sacrificing material comforts for lives as homeless but free vagabonds.

"I know of a number of homeless people, former workers who have dropped out, who spend their days in the warmth of libraries where they are among books and learning. At night they return to their cardboard homes underneath the trees of Yoyogi Park," Hatsuki said. (AFP)

Malaysia to Launch Sweep for 1.2 Million Illegal Immigrants

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia was preparing to deploy 3,000 security personnel on a nationwide sweep for an estimated 1.2 million illegal immigrants, following the midnight expiry of a six-month amnesty on Tuesday.

The personnel, including 1,000 soldiers, will carry out door-to-door checks of homes, offices and night markets, sealing off certain parts of the Malaysia-thailand border.

Illegal workers will face expulsion, and employers have also been threatened with stiff punishments.

"A force of more than 3,000 men is on standby, awaiting the order to go into action," Syed Abdul Zahid Wyed Ibrahim, an official at the department of Internal Security and Public Order, was reported saying in the New Straits Times.

There are about 450,000 legal foreign workers, but more than one million illegal labourers in the country, mainly from Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, India and Burma, according to official estimates.

The government at mid-year offered the illegal workers six months to come forward, and about 300,000 have so far been registered by 17,000 employers, according to the immigration department.

"But there are those who have not (registered) and it is time they face the music," Syed Abdul Zahid said.

Malaysia's rapid economic growth, averaging more than eight percent per year since 1987, has resulted in a labor crunch in the agricultural and construction sectors.

Foreign workers have also been blamed for social problems and outbreaks of communicable diseases amid crowded housing conditions.

Under the nation-wide crackdown, the illegal immigrants will be punished and then repatriated.

Local employers who are caught face hefty fines.

Under amendments to immigration laws that are awaiting royal assent, employers can be caned, jailed a maximum of five years and fined up to 30,000 ringgit ($12,000) for hiring illegal workers, officials warned. (AFP)

Indonesia's Population Closes on 200 Million

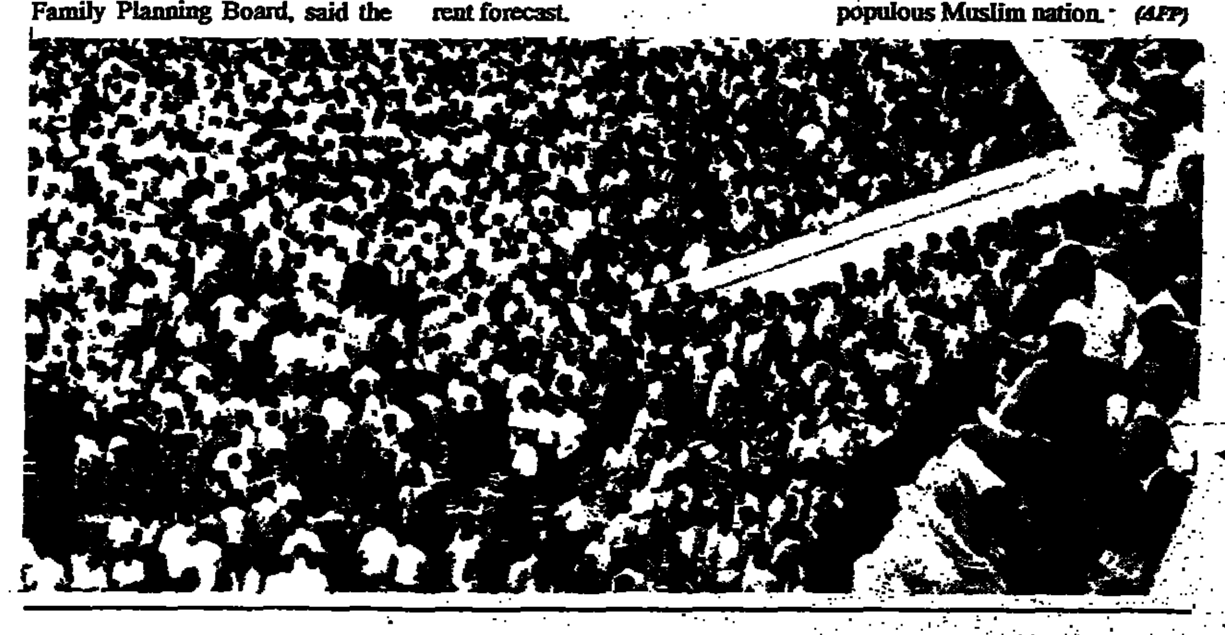
JAKARTA — The population of Indonesia, the world's fourth largest nation, has reached 199.7 million people, Population Minister Haryono Suyono has said.

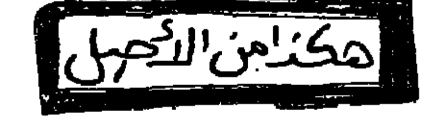
Suyono, head of the National Family Planning Board, said the current population level was less than had been expected, the official Antara news agency reported.

The minister cited forecasts which said Indonesia's population would reach 280 million by 2000. He did not say if this was the current forecast.

Suyono attributed the lower population level to an official birth control drive, which he said had reduced the number of children per family from six in 1970 to just 2.6 in 1996.

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim nation. (AFP)





China Adopts Law on Army Garrison in Hong Kong

BEIJING – China has passed a law to regulate the behavior of People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops stationed in Hong Kong after it reverts to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, next year, Xinhua news agency said.

The law was adopted Monday by the standing committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) — the country's highest legislative body.

Four years in the drafting, the final document was approved after last minute amendments from the standing committee, including one that tightened the ban on PLA troops from engaging in any commercial activities.

"The troops and military personnel shall not be engaged in profit-making businesses by any forms, nor can the military personnel be engaged in any other activity incompatible with their obligation," the redrafted amendment said.

Since the launching of China's economic reforms in 1979, the PLA has grown into one of China's largest business conglomerates with lucrative commercial interests in sectors ranging from space technology to icecream production.



Under the law, the military judicial authorities on the mainland will handle all criminal cases involving military personnel on duty, while the courts in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) — as the territory will be known after the handover — will deal with off-duty cases.

"I am certain that PLA troops will study every provision of the law, and Hong Kong residents are welcome to cooperate with the troops and see that their actions are in accordance with the law," said standing committee member Zhou Nan, who is also director of the Xinhua news agency in Hong Kong — Beijing's de facto consulate in the territory.

Tsang Hin-Chi, the only standing committee member from Hong Kong, said he was confident the people of the future SAR could accept the law totally.

The legislation will come into effect immediately on July 1. (AFP)

Racial Issue Raised in Singapore Election Campaign

SINGAPORE - Singapore's top leaders have dared an opposition candidate to sue them after calling him a Chinese chauvinist whose views could undermine peace in the multiracial city-state, press reports said Monday.

The issue has given a racial tinge to the campaign for Thursday's general elections in the island of three million people, 77 percent of whom are ethnic Chinese, 14 percent Malay and seven percent Indian.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and senior minister Lee Kuan Yew, in letters published Monday by the *Straits Times Daily*, stood by their views on Tang Liang Hong and refused to apologize for calling him a Chinese chauvinist.

Goh also said Tang could have a damaging impact on Singapore's multiracial and multilingual society if he was elected to Parliament.

Tang, 61, a lawyer who is standing as a Workers' Party candidate in a multipleseat ward, had threatened to sue them for saying he held radical views on the promotion of Chinese language and culture.

Goh's lawyers said in the rejoinder addressed to Tang's law firm that the premier "stands by everything he said." "Our client will continue to repeat the statements that he has made. Our client's statements are correct in facts where they are facts and as fair comment where they are comment," the letter said.

It invited Tang to "immediately commence proceedings against our client." Lawyers representing senior minister Lee, 73, also said he had no intentions of retracting his statements and that he looked forward to "the of the writ against him."

The issue goes back to a 1994 speech by Tang, who allegedly said there were too many Christians and English-educated Singaporeans in the cabinet and civil service.

In a 1995 community dialog, he reportedly said political power was concentrated in the English-educated elite while the Chinese-educated were left out of the mainstream.

Tang has denied being anti-Christian and said the ruling People's Action Party had labeled him a chauvinist to frighten voters and prevent him from entering Parliament.

The PAP has ruled this island republic uninterrupted since 1959 and is guaranteed a majority in the next Parliament as the opposition is not contesting for a majority of seats.

(AFP)

Kabul's Office for Doing Good and Abstaining From Evil

KABUL - On the fourth floor of a Kabul building that still advertises itself as the Afghan computing center are the offices of *amar bel maruf wa nahi al munkar* — the Department for Doing Good and Abstaining From Evil.

"The point of the department is to order people to abstain from doing bad things and to do good things," says department deputy-director Maulawi Enayatullah Baligh.

The department is run by the purist Islamic Taleban movement, who captured Kabul in late September and have vowed to take the rest of the country and impose their strict vision of Islamic law on the entire population.

It operates under the orders of Mullah Mohammed Omar, the Taleban leader, and is independent of other state organs.

"The Amir-al-Mומineen, leader of the faithful (a title awarded to mullah Omar by the Taleban) has the right to forcefully order people to do good things," Baligh told Reuters.

The department's edicts include banning women from most jobs forcing them to cover themselves completely, including their faces, outside the home and outlawing paper bags because they might have the name of God printed or written on them and, if thrown away, would constitute an insult to the deity.

A recent decree, over the signature of the General President of the General Presidency, Maulawi Rafiullah Muazin, threatens Afghan women if they apply for jobs with foreign aid agencies working in Afghanistan.

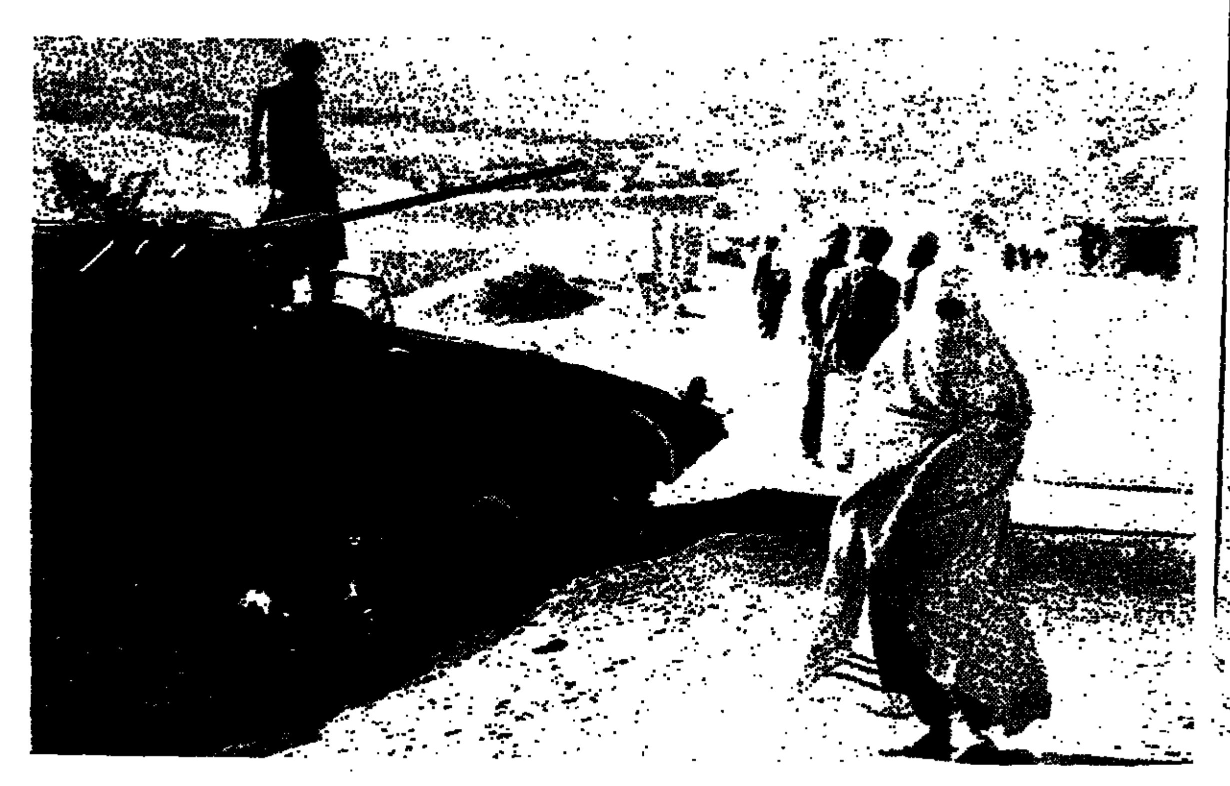
"We kindly request all our Afghan sisters to not apply for jobs in foreign agencies and to avoid going there. Otherwise if they are chased, threatened or investigated by us, they will bear the responsibility," it says.

Foreign agencies should avoid employing Afghan females "we also declare to foreign agencies to respect the issued regulation of Islamic state of Afghanistan and they should strictly avoid employing Afghan females." Baligh said the department has 15 sub-departments, including those of investigation, publicity and invitation.

"We work on the principle of what Islam has ordered. We have our clerics who sit together and discuss issues from the viewpoint of Islam and the welfare of society," he said.

"After discussion we inform the people of our decisions through the mass media. If the orders are not implemented, we have the investigating department who go out and see the situation in the streets and in the markets. The invitation department has the right to inform people what is wrong and invite them to do the right thing.

"If people repeatedly disregard the instructions of the department, we can punish them with lashings and beatings." Baligh said the Supreme Court deals with cases of major crimes such as murder and adultery, but the department can issue limited punishments. "The job of the department is to advise and threaten people. In case of people not listening to us, we can sentence them to up to 39 lashes," he added.



The members of the Investigation Department, however, are allowed to shoot to kill if they witness a murder in progress.

The punishment for murderers and married adulterers is death. Unmarried adulterers recieve 100 lashes.

Relative executes murderer convicted of killing family the department overlooks a school field, where a murderer was executed on December 18 by the father of the family he was convicted of killing, the first such execution since the Taleban took Kabul.

Baligh said the edict that women should only leave their house wearing the Burqa,

(Contd on Pg.14)

Peru Embassy Siege Eclipses Shining Path Rebels

LIMA - The shining path rebel group held center-stage through 16 years of war in Peru — until 13 days ago.

With the audacious siege of the Japanese ambassador's residence, the little-known Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) has now eclipsed the bloodier and stronger Shining Path as the highest-profile rebel group in Peru.

The 20 heavily armed MRTA rebels, explosives strapped to their backs, captured high-level diplomats, politicians and businessmen and stormed onto the front pages all over the world.

The MRTA, no more than 100-strong nationwide, with one stroke sidelined the Shining Path, which is 10 times larger and one of the most feared rebel armies in Latin America.

"The Shining Path differs from the MRTA in that it has never been in the same business of armed propaganda," said a British authority on Peruvian politics, John Crabtree.

"But now there is a possibility that members of the Shining Path — especially in Lima — will be attracted to the MRTA because they are seen doing more and grabbing more attention," he said.

All of Peru — and much of the world — was talking about the MRTA rebels, who had freed most of their 500 plus VIP hostages but still held 83 on Monday.

The Shining Path made news only once during the siege with an attack that did little more than reinforce the government's allegation that their members are more like common criminals than freedom-fighters.

On Christmas day, 20 Shining Path guerrillas stabbed six men to death in the northern province of Chiclayo about 500 miles (800 km) north of Lima in a reprisal for their family's collaboration with the police, authorities said.

"There is a big difference between the two. The Shining Path is much bloodier," taxi driver Hugo Seminario said. "If it had been the Shining Path (at the residence), they would have killed at least 10 by now." In contrast, conscious of the publicity it was generating, MRTA was not likely to kill any hostages, David Scott Palmer, an author on Peruvian guerrillas, based in Boston, said.

The two groups are rivals, with the MRTA drawing inspiration from Cuban communism while the Shining Path prefers Maoism. Prisoners from the two armies have in the past attacked each other in jail and the groups have never operated together.

Granted a worldwide audience, Nestor Cerpa Cartolini, the mastermind of the siege leading the rebels inside the compound, has not lost the opportunity to hit out at the Maoists.

"We cannot acccept that we continue to be compared to the Shining Path, an organization that we have repeatedly condemned for its irrational use of violence that affects the Peruvian people themselves," he said in a statement read by a freed hostage.

The MRTA emerged in the 1980s as a Robin Hood-style movement that hijacked trucks and distributed goods to peasants. But as it gradually stepped up its kidnapping and bombing operations and strengthened its links to the illegal drugs trade, the group dramatically lost favor.

Nevertheless, the MRTA has been responsible for a fraction of the death toll in Peru's guerrilla wars, according to a leading Peruvian analyst on the rebel groups, Carlos Tapia. Of 30,000 lives lost, the MRTA has killed no more than 200 soldiers, while as many as 20,000 civilian have died at the hands of the Shining Path or Peruvian security forces, he added.

Throughout the embassy siege, the MRTA has claimed the attack was necessary to force the government into a dialoge aimed at a permanent peace accord.

In contrast, the Shining Path, which for several years after the 1992 capture of its leader, Abimael Guzman, made overtures to hold their own negotiations, has now clearly left behind its flirtation with peace.

Severely weakened since Guzman's imprisonment, the group surged back onto its violent path earlier this year and raised public fears of a real comeback with a deadly campaign of coordinated bombings and murders across the country.

"The Shining Path has been eclipsed in the media but on the ground it has much more activity," Crabtree said. "Not as strong as it once was, it prevails over large areas and still has the ability to operate in various theatres."

(Reuter)



